TOUR CODE

YHTN

ADVENTURESABROAD

TUNISIA

A Special Tour with Yvette Haakmeester

18 days

Updated 06/01/2013

Day 1 ***Arrival in Tunis***

Welcome to Tunisia!

Tunis, the capital of the country and vibrant metropolis. Situated on the Gulf of Tunis on the Mediterranean Sea, the modern city extends along the coastal plains and surrounding hills. It is a city of colourful contrasts, from the French colonial Ville Nouvelle, the dynamic Arab souqs of the old Medina, to the array of modern shops and European cafes.

This evening we meet and go out for dinner at a local restaurant.

Overnight in Tunis. Meal plan: Dinner, if required.

Day 2 ***Tunis: Bardo Museum, Medina & Carthage***

We begin the day with a visit to the Bardo Museum, recently re-opened after extensive renovations. The Bardo houses the largest and finest collection of ancient mosaics in the world. These mosaics were discovered in the wealthiest of Roman villas in the many ancient cities found in Tunisia. Rich patrons commissioned a vast array of subjects and themes, from scenes of gods & goddesses, daily life (hunting, fishing, harvesting), the zodiac, seasons, amphitheatre games. From their exquisite details, we can understand why the North African school of mosaicists was the finest in the ancient world, and whose masterpieces can be found throughout the Mediterranean. As well, there are also fine sculpture galleries, exhibits of Punic, early Christian & Islamic artefacts, and an exhibition of magnificent bronzes from the 1st BC Mahdia shipwreck.

Next, we embark on a walking tour of old Tunis, with its narrow lanes crowded with markets, mosques, tombs and palaces. This was Tunis until the arrival of the French in the late 19th century, who subsequently built their own quarter -- the Ville Nouvelle -- just beyond the "Sea Gate" -- Bab al Bahr -- which today stands in the middle of Place de la Victoire. Here is the Cathedral of St. Vincent de Paul, the central market and some fine examples of colonial architecture. On our walk in the medina, we pass through the bustling souks of spices, herbs, carpets clothing and gold. We visit the Souk des Chechias, the area of workshops where the traditional red hats of the Maghreb (since Ottoman times) are still being made by hand. En route, we will see the Great Mosque of Tunis -- Jemaa Zitouna and the elegant Place du Governement in the old Kasbah square. We finish with a visit to the Museum -- Tomb complex of Sidi Kacem Jelizi.

Our afternoon is dedicated to Carthage -- the legendary city of Queen Dido and Hannibal. We begin with a visit to the Tophet, or sanctuary of Baal and Tanit. Roman propaganda, hostile to the Carthaginians, stated that the Carthaginians ritually sacrificed their children here to the gods. We continue to the Punic ports, with the remains of its sophisticated naval harbour from which Hannibal set sail, and the merchant harbour from which cargo ships engaged in trade throughout the Mediterranean. Next are the Roman Antonine Baths; in the 2nd century AD, these were the largest in North Africa and 3rd largest in the Roman world. Our final stop is Byrsa Hill, the ancient acropolis and earliest Phoenician settlement. At the end of our tour, we have some time in the Carthage Archaeological Museum.

Overnight in Tunis. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 3 *Tunis - Oudna - Wine Tasting - Hammamet*

Today we drive along the surviving stretches of the ancient aqueduct of Roman Carthage. Water was carried by a complex system of pipes, reservoirs and conduits supported on lofty arches from Zaghouan springs to the city center – a distance of over 130 km ! To the spectacular hilltop site of Roman Uthina (Oudna). Off-the-beaten-track – and unknown to many – this beautiful site offers sweeping views of the rolling countryside and local shepherds grazing their sheep amidst the ruins. We explore the Capitolium Temple, forum, baths and well preserved amphitheatre (where many documentaries have been filmed).

After a lovely drive through wine country with its picturesque villages -- we are treated to a visit to a local winery -- where we will have a chance to tour the vineyards, cellars and sample some excellent Tunisian wines. We spend the night in Hammamet, formerly a sleepy fishing village and today a pretty seaside resort.

Overnight in Hammamet. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 4 *Cap Bon*

A relaxing day exploring the beauty of Cap Bon. Passing some lovely scenery of this fertile region, we stop at Menzil Temime to visit the Punic necropolis. Here we find rock-cut tombs dating to the 4th & 3rd centuries BC, some with well preserved paintings inside. Next is Kerkouane, the only purely Phoenician city known and a UNESCO World Heritage site. Dating as far back to the 6th century BC, this exceptional site has the remains of squares, temples, residential areas, workshops, murex purple dye factories and superb necropolis.

We continue to the charming fishing town of Kelibia, located on perhaps the finest sand beaches in Tunisia, and crowned by a splendid Byzantine -- Ottoman fortress. We spend the afternoon swimming and enjoying fine dining on the sea. Be sure to bring your swimsuit and towel! (weather permitting...)

Overnight in Hammamet. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 5 *Hammamet - Testour - Dougga - Tabarka*

Today we head to the NW extreme of the country. Our first stop it he charming village of Testour, founded by refugees fleeing Andalusia in the 17th century. With them brought their sophisticated culture -- everything from agricultural techniques and products, to decorative tilework, fine architecture, music and poetry. The inhabitants remain proud of their heritage, visible in their hospitality, dress, craftsmanship and arts. We see the Great Mosque with its tiled octagonal minaret – the only one in Tunisia with a clock -- recalling the church bell towers of Aragon and Castile. We follow the Medjerda river valley to Dougga, the best preserved Roman city in Tunisia, and also a UNESCO World Heritage site. The monumental Capitolium Temple stands in the main Forum, with breathtaking views over the surrounding plains. The theatre, baths, shops, stone paved streets and lavish villas are all testimony to the golden age of this North African city. We continue via Sejnane and Nefza to Tabarka -- one of the haunts of the infamous Barbary pirates. It was from the port of Tabarka that exotic wild animals from Africa were shipped to the rest of the Roman Empire, for amphitheatre games and triumphal processions. Also exported was Numidian marble -- coveted for its unusual gold & pink hues, and in 16th century, red coral, African commodities and slaves. We make a brief stop to see the Genoese fortress and the eerie sandstone formations, known locally as "The Needles".

Overnight in Tabarka. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 6 *Tabarka - Chemtou - Bulla Regia - Le Kef*

From Tabarka we drive into the Khroumirie Mountains and the cork forests of Ain Draham. A dramatic descent takes us to Bulla Regia -- famous for its unique subterranean villas. These luxurious residences belonged to some of the wealthiest families of the Roman era, and in which we can see some fine mosaics, some still in situ. To Chemtou -- ancient Simmithus -- the site of the ancient quarries of Numidian marble. On site is a fascinating museum, set up as a joint Tunisian-German venture, dedicated to the marble quarries, Numidian society and the Roman history of the site. We continue to fortified town Le Kef ("the Rock") located 800 m above sea level and 42 km from the Algerian frontier. Although settled since Neolithic times, its current form dates back to the days when it was an Ottoman bastion. We spend some time exploring the narrow streets and historic monuments of old Le Kef.

Overnight in the region of Le Kef. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 7 *Le Kef - Elles - Jugurtha's Table - Haidra - Sbeitla*

From Le Kef, a short detour takes us to Elles, a very ancient necropolis with over 72 Numidian megalithic tombs. First evidence of such structures dates to the 3rd millennium BC, with the oldest megalithic structures at Malta and later, the nuraghes of Sardegna. Who the builders were of these impressive structures in North Africa remains a mystery. We head south into the region of the Tunisian Dorsale Mountains -- the final Western extension of the Atlas mountains. To Jugurtha's Table, a strange flat-topped mountain named after the Numidian King Jugurtha, who used it as a base during his seven year campaign against the Romans, 112-107 BC. At over 1270 m / sea level and 80 hectares in size, a short climb is rewarded with spectacular views over the surrounding countryside and into Algeria. Our next stop is Haidra, ancient Ammaedara -- a remote Roman outpost only a few kilometres from the Algerian frontier. Only minimally excavated, we feel as though we have discovered this elusive site ourselves! We explore the site, with its well-preserved Byzantine and Vandal churches, Roman triumphal arch, massive Byzantine fortress and distinctive tower tombs. We continue to Sbeitla and overnight. Our hotel has a terrace overlooking the Roman site, whose temples are illuminated at night.

Overnight in Sbeitla. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 8 *Sbeitla - Sidi Bouzid - Tozeur*

This morning we visit the spectacular Roman site of Sufeitula. The civic center is one of the most photographed sites in the country, with its excellently preserved triple Temple dedicated to Juno, Jupiter and Minerva dominating the Forum. We walk through the paved streets to see the olive presses, public baths, and numerous early Christian basilicas. We make a brief stop in the centre of Sidi Bouzid, the "birthplace" of Tunisia’s so-called Jasmine Revolution (Dec. 17 2010-Jan. 14, 2011), which inadvertently led to the ousting of President Ben Ali and the Arab Spring. We continue to Tozeur where we will spend 2 nights. In medieval times, Tozeur was an important cultural and market center, due to its strategic location on the caravan routes. Merchants from North and West Africa gathered in this thriving oasis, trade such goods as wool, dates, gold, ivory, salt and slaves. Some of the finest dates of the world are grown in the region, the deglat nour or "finger of light". Medieval accounts state that over 1,000 camels used to leave here per day, laden only with dates! We some time to explore medieval quarter to admire some of the 14th century architecture and distinctive style brickwork before heading tour our hotel.

Overnight in Tozeur. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 9 *Tozeur & the Mountain Oases*

We start the day with an excursion to the Mountain Oases of Chebika, Mides and Tamerza. Located amidst the rugged outcrops of the Atlas mountains, not far from the Algerian frontier, these date back to Roman times when they served as military outposts to control the caravan trade. In Chebika, we take walk to see the abandoned village and source of the springs. To Mides -- with a spectacular canyon -- made famous in the film, The English Patient. We continue to Tamerza, where we walk through the picturesque ghost village of the oasis. We return to Tozeur, where enter the oasis and the Museum of the Palmerie, where we will learn about the history of date cultivation, visit a plantation and sample some local delicacies made from dates. Rest of the afternoon at leisure.

Overnight in Tozeur. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 10 *Tozeur - Desert Camp*

We drive across the Chott el Jerid, the great Salt Lake which serves as a barrier between the fertile north and the Sahara desert. If we are lucky, we might see a mirage or two. We stop in Douz for lunch, the "Gateway of the Sahara" before meeting our 4x4 excursion to our desert camp. Located amidst the dunes and far from tour package holiday hoards, we can enjoy the tranquillity and vastness of the Sahara. Later this afternoon, you may wish to take sunset excursion into the dunes by camel. Dinner will be taken under the stars.

Hotel: Camp Mars, Tembain*

NB: Camp Mars, Tembain a desert camp with roomy tents, complete with beds and small furniture. Shared / public blocks with toilets and showers are available, as only some of the bivouacs have en suite bathrooms. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 11 *Desert Camp - Douiret*

After enjoying sunrise over the dunes, we depart by 4x4 to the area known as the "Berber South" or the Land of the Ksour. This mountainous area is dotted with medieval ksour -- monumental fortified granaries. Local tribes used these for storage and defence right up until the mid 20th century. Similar to beehives, each ksar is composed of a series of individual cells -- ghorfas -- superimposed on one another -- some as high as 8 stories! The region is scattered with these strange but magnificent monumental ksour from ancient times. Between today and tomorrow, we will stop at some of the best examples in the region, including Ksar Haddada, Ksar Mourabtine, Chenini hilltop village -- to name just a few. Tonight we stay in the ancient hilltop Berber village of Douiret, our rooms are original troglodyte dwellings.

NB: because this is a renovated group of ancient homes, there is one shared bathroom for every 3-4 rooms (with toilets and showers).

Overnight near Douiret. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 12 *The Ksour Region - Djerba*

Early this morning we have a chance to meet with a local shepherd*(if available) and accompany him with his herds of Arbi goats, the black long-haired goats typical of Southern Tunisia. We take a short trek to explore the abandoned part of ancient Douiret. We then for the Isle of Djerba via the 6.7 km Roman causeway. En route, we will stop at various sites including Guellala, the pottery production centre of the island, where traditional "octopus" pots are still made.

Tonite we will go out for dinner to one of the many fine restaurants on Djerba.

Overnight in Djerba. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 13 *The Island of Djerba*

The Isle of Djerba, the "Land of the Lotus Eaters" in Homer's Odyssey is steeped in history. The natives of Djerba are themselves a distinct society, with their own customs, dress and dialect. Berbers, Phoenicians, Jews, Arabs, Christians, Normans, Aragonese, Ottomans and Barbary corsairs have all left an imprint on Djerba. We spend the morning touring this fascinating island.

We visit the El Ghriba Synagogue, the oldest synagogue in North Africa and a holy pilgrimage site. Legend states that is was built by refugees in the 6th century BC, when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem. The structure we see today echoes the architectural and artistic influences of Moorish Spain and North Africa. In spite of a number of diasporas and emigrations in the past, there is still a small but thriving Jewish community on the island. We will also see the Fadloune Mosque near Midoun, built in the 11th century by the Ibadite Muslims of Djerba -- an austere sect which dates back to the earliest years of Islam. It is the quintessential Djerban mosque with its whitewashed dome and simplicity of style. We visit the Museum of Patrimony, an superb ethnographic museum dedicated to the traditional culture, costumes and arts of both Djerba and Tunisia. We also have a chance to stop in one of the lively weekly street markets on the island, which moves from town to town. We head to the main city of the island, Houmt Souq. Originally the main market centre of the island, the rest of the town grew up around the souqs. We walk the narrow streets and covered passage ways to explore the handicrafts of the island, stopping at the market where the daily fish auction takes place. We see the Borj el Kebir, the main fortress of the island, originally built by the Aghlabids in the form of a ribat -- like those found in Monastir and Sousse. The fortress changed hands many times over history, but its most famous moment was in 1560. Ottoman Turks, under the command of the Barbary corsair Dragut, besieged the Spanish Armada who had retreated into the fort. The Spanish were massacred and their skulls used to build a pyramid on the beach to warn any potential future invaders.

The rest of the afternoon is at leisure, to explore more of the island, shop, or spend time at the beach.

Overnight in Djerba. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 14 *Djerba - Mareth - Toujane - Matmata - Sfax*

Depart by ferry for the mainland. Our first stop is Mareth to visit the Military Museum and see the remnants of the Mareth line. The Mareth line was originally built by the French in 1936, as a defensive line against a possible attack by the Italians coming from Libya. The Germans would later use the Mareth line to block the Allied advance from the East in 1943; in the ensuing battle and capture by the Allies in March 1943, the Mareth line was virtually destroyed. It consisted of a defensive line of 72 concrete bunkers placed at regular intervals for nearly 45km, and laid with about 140,000 mines. Here too, is the command post of Rommel, "the Desert Fox" which is illustrated in the Museum. Here we will learn the history of Operation "Torch" and the Battle for Tunisia, and roles of such figures as Erwin Rommel, Dwight D. Eisenhower, and Bernard Montgomery.

The drive is spectacular today, as we ascend a pass 585m above the plains below. Here we encounter the stone houses of the ancient village of Toujane, scattered across two sides of a deep gorge -- the road flanked by 2 looming fortresses (kala'a) which once protected the medieval caravans. To Matmata, named after the Berber tribe which inhabited this area since at least the 16th century. The people here have traditionally lived in circular, underground pit dwellings carved out of the rock, complete with courtyards, kitchens and bedrooms. We visit some of the troglogdyte dwellings in the region and meet the some of the families who own them. We continue up the coast to Sfax, the second largest city in

Tunisia. Sfax was built over the ancient city of Taparura, the stones from which may be seen in many old buildings of the medina. Its massive stone ramparts date to the era of the Aghlabids in the 9th century, and held out against the 11th century Hilalian invasions, after which it became a thriving metropolis, its economy based on maritime trade and the Sahel's olive industry. Today it is a major commercial and manufacturing centre (mainly of olive oil, almonds, phosphates and textiles) with very little tourism. Sfax is said to have the finest "living and working" medina in which we will spend the afternoon wandering the narrow passageways and covered souks. Part of the Blacksmith's souq was featured in the film, The English Patient. One of the most colourful sites of Sfax is the monumental covered fish market in the center which we will visit either today or tomorrow in the morning.

Overnight in Sfax. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 15 *Sfax - El Djem - Kairouan*

Today we head inland to El Djem (ancient Thysdrus) to see its magnificent amphitheatre, used to stage the wild beast and gladiator fights so loved by the Romans. The amphitheatre is one of the best preserved of its kind, far surpassing the ruins of the Coliseum of Rome. Built by the short-lived Emperor Gordion in the 3rd century CE, it consists of an oval arena surrounded by 3 tiers of seats rising to a height of 30m, with an estimated capacity of 30,000. From the upper tiers, we can view the elaborate underground system of tunnels and chambers where wild animals and prisoners were kept before entering the arena. The second main attraction is the opulent villas discovered nearby, paved with fine mosaics and of palatial proportions. We will spend some time exploring the villas, and in particular, the mansion of "The House of Africa" before seeing the stunning mosaics unearthed here -- on display in the Archaeological Museum.

To Kairouan, where Islam gained its first foothold in the Maghreb in the late 7th century. Kairouan was also the 4tch city to be established outside Arabia by Arab conquerors. The afternoon we go for a walk through the beautifully preserved medina of Kairouan, stopping to admire houses with their beautiful facades, decorative iron grills and brightly-coloured shutters and doors. We may see weaving workshops on the way, where local textiles are still hand-woven on traditional looms, and the bakeries were a vast array of local sweets are made. A photographer's delight!

Overnight in Kairouan. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 16 *Kairouan - Monastir - Sousse*

We spend the morning exploring the historic monuments of Kairouan. We visit the Great Mosque, North Africa's oldest and most historically important mosque, grand in the simplicity and harmony of its design as an expression of the faith. From here we will visit the Zaouia of Sidi Sahab, also known as "The Mosque of the Barber"; originally built in the 7th century, it houses the mausoleum of the venerated Sidi Sahab, a companion of the Prophet Mohammed. The interior is richly decorated with ornamental stucco ceilings and stunning tile work. We also visit the Aghlabid basins, enormous cisterns which were built in the 9th century under the Aghlabids -- the first Islamic dynasty under which the finest Islamic monuments in Tunisia were built.

Returning to the coast, we go to Monastir to see the 8th century ribat, a kind of fortified Islamic monastery, after which the city is named. The Ribat of Monastir affords wonderful views of the city and the sea. North African ribats were built when the inhabitants were threatened by invading European armies; they served not only a military but religious purpose as well, as fortresses and places of prayer and study for devout soldiers. This spectacular ribat was used as a backdrop in numerous films, including Zeferelli's Jesus of Nazareth and Monty Python's Life of Brian. Nearby is the Mausoleum of Habib Bourguiba (ca. 1903-2000), the first president of Tunisia after independence, and who was born here in Monastir. Habib Bourguiba is revered as the pater patriae of Tunisia, the father of his country, the reformer and modernizer of the nation. We continue to the colorful city of Sousse. Tonight we will go out to a restaurant on the elegant yacht marina of Port el Kantaoui.

Overnight in Sousse. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 17 *Sousse - Takrouna - Tunis / Sidi Bou Said*

This morning you will have some free time in Sousse. You may wish visit one of the many monuments here, such as the the 9th century Ribat, Great Mosque, Archaeological Museum in the Kasbah, the Catacombs of the Good Shepherd, or simply wander the medina with its many cafes and shops. Your tour leader will assist you in whatever you wish to do.

We meet our bus and continue to the hilltop Berber village of Takrouna, which towers over the Enfida valley, overlooking the Bay of Hammamet and the mountain of Zaghouan. We will ascend by foot to the top of this picturesque traditional village, where we take a break at le Rocher Bleu, a combined cafe, restaurant & art gallery. The Blue Rock Project was conceived as a way to revive the village, by a local artist who was born here in Takrouna. To Sidi Bou Said, the beautiful village on a cliff, renowned for its blue and white houses and distinctive Moorish doors. Its serene beauty, and Andalusian inspired architecture, attracted many artists and writers including Paul Klee, August Macke, Simone de Beauvoir, Andre Gide, and Jean Foucault. You will have free time to explore this charming village, followed by our farewell dinner in a fine restaurant nearby. Overnight in Sidi Bou Said (or Tunis)

NB: hotel space is limited in Sidi Bou Said; if unavailable, we will stay in Tunis

Overnight in Sidi Bou Said / Tunis. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 18 *Departure*

Departure from Tunis.

BON VOYAGE! Meal plan: Breakfast.