

Tunis تونس



Arabian, African and Mediterranean, Middle Eastern and European, yet curiously provincial – the laid back capital of Tunis has two distinct hearts.

The new city, created by French colonials in the 19th century, is an orderly European grid, with wrought-iron balconies, cafés and pâtisseries bordering the boulevards. The city's main drag, palm-lined ave Habib Bourguiba, is prime territory for promenading, coffee-drinking, gossiping and idly watching the passing human traffic.

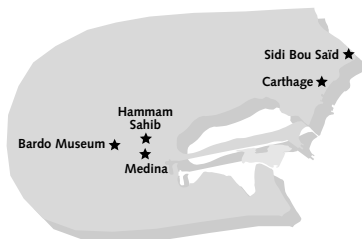
Founded by the Arabs in the 8th century, the medina, the old city, is the city's historic and symbolic heart. Here you enter a tangled maze of narrow streets, winding and arched, with giant keyhole-shaped doors, scattering cats, alley communities, workshops and glittering souqs selling everything but your mother. Here all the lanes, however twisted, will eventually lead to the great mosque. People watch people go by from within kaleidoscopic-tiled coffeehouses, suckling on hubbly-bubbly pipes and indulging in chat, chequers and chess.

Outside the two-part centre lie some even bigger attractions: the ruins of once-magnificent Carthage, set among the great white mansions of Tunis' contemporary upper classes; the astounding, enormous collection of Roman mosaics housed in the Bardo's Ottoman palace; and the flower-laden cliff-top village of Sidi Bou Saïd that inspired Paul Klee and August Macke to experiment with colour.

However urban Tunis (home to 90% of Tunisia's population) might feel compared with the rest of the country, you are never far from the beach. The suburbs stretch endlessly out along deep-blue seafronts, where in summer everyone walks in search of a breeze.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Get lost and shop till you drop in the **medina** (p71)
- See Baron Erlanger's fantastical mansion and sip tea at sunset in **Sidi Bou Saïd** (p96)
- Be amazed by the incredible Roman mosaics at the palatial **Bardo Museum** (p50)
- Imagine the glories of ancient **Carthage** (p90)
- Scrub, sweat and socialise at a stuck-in-time **Hammam Sahib** (p71) in Halfaouine



HISTORY

Once insignificant, Tunis (ancient Tynes) features on 5th-century BC maps, and the Roman general Regulus camped here in 255 BC during the First Punic War.

The Carthaginians and the Romans ruled from Byrsa Hill, on the coast to the east, but after ousting the Byzantines in AD 695, the victorious Arab Hassan bin Nooman decided to build at Tunis, which he felt was in a better defensive position. The medina was sited on a narrow band of high ground flanked by the Sebket Sejoumi (a salt lake) to the southwest and Lake Tunis to the east. A deep-water channel was dug across the lake to access the sea.

The city was born with the building of the Zaytouna (Great) Mosque (p71) in AD 732, but it was in the 9th century, when Aghlabid ruler Ibrahim ibn Ahmed II moved his court here, that it became the seat of power.

Tunis declined under the Fatimids, who chose Mahdia as their capital in the 10th century, and escaped the ravages of the 11th-century Hilalian invasion, emerging again as capital following the Almohad North African conquest in 1160.

The city flourished and trade boomed under the Hafsids, who ruled from 1229 to 1574. The population more than tripled (to about 60,000). Souqs (markets), mosques, *medersas* (Quranic schools) and the Zaytouna Mosque University were established.

Tunis suffered badly during Turkish-Spanish tussles, leading to the fall of the Hafsids. Much of the city was destroyed and the population fled. Sinan Pasha finally secured the city for the Ottomans in 1574, and

people began to return, including refugees fleeing religious persecution: Moorish Andalusians from Spain and Jews from Livorno in Italy. Many were fine artisans who played an important role in the city's reconstruction.

In the 19th century, the colonising French built their elegant Ville Nouvelle (new town) on land reclaimed from Lake Tunis, moving the city's focus and causing the medina to decline.

ORIENTATION

Almost everything of practical importance to travellers is within the Ville Nouvelle.

The main east–west road is ave Habib Bourguiba, running from Lake Tunis to place de l'Indépendance, with the medina at its western end. A causeway at the eastern end carries road and light-rail traffic east across Lake Tunis to La Goulette, and then north along the coast to the suburbs of Carthage, Sidi Bou Saïd, La Marsa and Gammarth.

The main north–south thoroughfare is the street known as ave de Carthage to the south of ave Habib Bourguiba and as ave de Paris to the north. Just west of ave de Carthage is place Barcelone, hub of the city's excellent *métro léger* (tram network). The train station is on the square's southern side.

Maps

The tourist office hands out a good, free map of Tunis, as well as one of the medina that's fairly accurate. The best maps are produced by the **Office de la Topographie et de la Cartographie** (☎ 71 832 933; www.otc.nat.tn; 13 rue de Jordanie), including *Tunis – Ariana/Bardo*, covering the city centre, and *La Marsa, Sidi Bou Saïd, Carthage & La Goulette*, showing

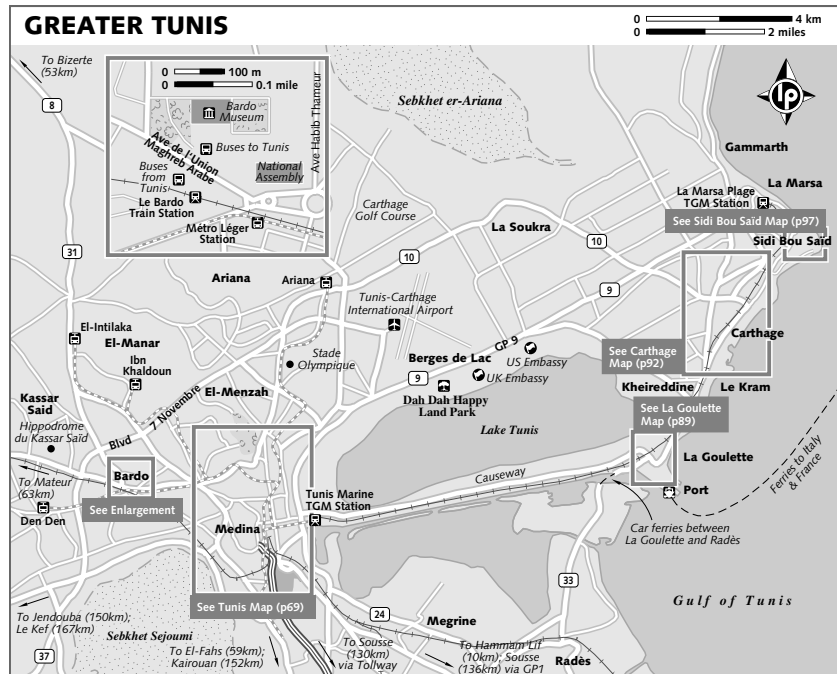
TUNIS IN...

Two Days

Head to the **Bardo** (p50) in the morning, returning to the centre for lunch and to explore the **medina** (p71), before a promenade and reviving drink on **avenue Habib Bourguiba**. Finish up at the extraordinary 18th-century medina restaurant **Dar el-Jeld** (p82). The next day, explore the ancient sites of **Carthage** (p90) and then visit the whitewashed village of **Sidi Bou Saïd** (p96), drinking in the views and having dinner at one of the village's restaurants.

Four Days

Spend a day wandering the **medina** (p71) and have dinner at **Dar el-Jeld** (p82). The next day go to **Carthage** (p90) and finish up in romantic blue-and-white **Sidi Bou Saïd** (p96). Head to the **Bardo** (p50) the third day. On your last day, return to the medina to stock up on souvenirs and atmosphere.



the coastal suburbs. Both are on a scale of 1:10,000 and cost TD9.

These maps are on sale at the office or at Espace Diwan 9 (see below).

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Al-Kitab (Map pp72-3; 43 ave Habib Bourguiba; ☎ 8am-9pm Mon-Fri, 8am-11pm Sat) Maps, travel guides and cookery books, and a few English titles.

Espace Diwan 9 (Map pp72-3; 9 rue Sidi ben Arous; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Sat Apr-Sep, to 7pm Oct-Mar) A good selection of books about Tunisia; also sells CDs, old books and photographs.

Librairie Claire Fontaine (Map pp72-3; 14 rue d'Alger) Excellent selection of French books, and some lovely coffee-table books on Tunisia in French and English.

Second-hand bookshop (Map pp72-3; rue d'Angleterre) Some English titles; owner will buy and exchange books.

Cultural Centres

British Council (Map p69; ☎ 71 848 588; www.britishcouncil.org/tunisia.htm; 87 ave Mohamed V)

Centre Culturel Français (Map p69; ☎ 71 105 262; 87 ave de la Liberté)

Centre d'Information Americain (☎ 71 107 000; route de l'Aouina)

Centre Russe (Map p69; ☎ 71 780 953; 34 ave de la Liberté)

Goethe Institut (Map p69; ☎ 71 844 973; 6 rue du Sénégal)

Institut Cervantes (Map p69; ☎ 71 788 847; 120 ave de la Liberté)

Emergency

Ambulance (☎ 190)

Police (Map pp72-3; ☎ 197) The most central police station is on rue Jamel Abdelnasser; some English spoken.

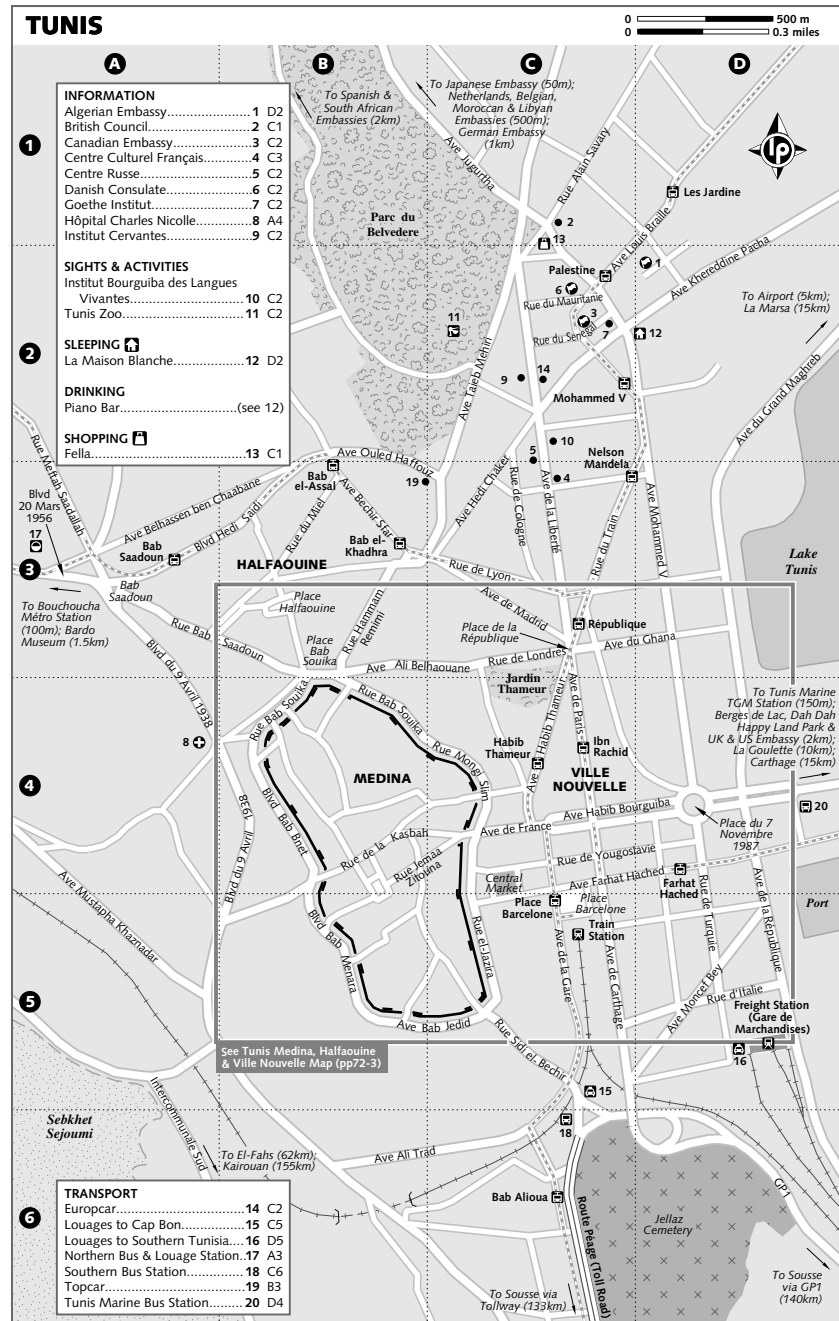
Internet Access

You can access free wi-fi at El-Hana International (see Brasserie Les 2 Avenues, p84) on ave Habib Bourguiba.

Publinet (per hr TD1.5-2) ave Habib Bourguiba (Map pp72-3; 28 ave Habib Bourguiba); rue de Grèce (Map pp72-3; rue de Grèce); rue Mokhtar (Map pp72-3; rue Mokhtar)

Laundry

Lavarie Tahar (Map pp72-3; 15 rue d'Allemagne; ☎ 7am-6.30pm Mon-Sat) Charges TD6 to wash and dry 5kg.



Medical Services

Local paper *La Presse* lists late-night chemists. If you have a minor ailment that needs medical assistance, ask a chemist to recommend a nearby clinic.

Hôpital Charles Nicolle (Map p69; ☎ 71 578 346; blvd du 9 Avril 1938)

Money

The major banks (with ATMs) line ave Habib Bourguiba; banks and ATMs are everywhere, including the airport.

Amen (Map pp72-3; Place du 7 Novembre 1987)

Banque de l'Habitat (Map pp72-3; 44 ave Habib Bourguiba)

BIAT (Map pp72-3; 1 rue Jamel Abdelnasser)

UBCI (Map pp72-3; 23 ave Habib Bourguiba)

UIB (Map pp72-3; 29 ave Habib Bourguiba)

Post

Main post office (Map pp72-3; ☎ 71 320 610; rue Charles de Gaulle; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Sat, 9-11am Sun Sep-Jun, 7.30am-1.30pm, 6-8pm Mon-Fri, 7.30am-1.30pm Sat, 9-11am Sun Jul & Aug) Has poste restante (TD0.4 per item).

Telephone

There are plentiful Publitel telephone offices, with coin-operated phones, some of which open 24 hours.

Tunisiana (Map pp72-3; ave Habib Bourguiba) There are several of these offices dotted around town, where you can buy a local SIM card (see p299).

Tunisie Telecom (Map pp72-3; ☎ 71 801 717; rue Jamel Abdelnasser; ☎ 8.15am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.15am-12.15pm Sat Sep-Jun, 7.15am-1pm Mon-Fri, 7.15-11.15am Sat Jul & Aug)

Tourist Information

Tourist office (Map pp72-3; ☎ 71 341 077; 1 ave Mohammed V; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Sat, 9am-noon Sun) Has a Tunis map, Tunisia road map and brochures on Carthage and the medina (all free). Other branches are at the train station (same hours) and airport (24 hours).

Travel Agencies

There are lots of central travel agencies including **Carthage Tours** (Map pp72-3; ☎ 71 347 015; ave Habib Bourguiba)

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Tunis is a safe city, though you should beware of pickpockets in the medina. The medina and Halfaouine district after dark are also not particularly salubrious.

TOP FIVE PLACES TO GET LOST

- Bin the map and wander around the warren surrounding the **Zaytouna Mosque** (opposite).
- Meander around the northwest medina close to **Mosque of Sidi Mehres** (p75) and out to Place Halfaouine.
- Take some wrong turns around the **Sidi Bou Saïd backstreets** (p96).
- Dive into olive-and-*harissa* (chilli paste) central – the buzzing area around Tunis' **Central Market** (p83).
- Walk from site to site in **Carthage** (p90), imagining away the glitzy suburb and following the footsteps of Dido, Aeneas and Hannibal.

Taxi Cons

The main annoyance for visitors to Tunis is the occasional unscrupulous taxi driver. You're most at risk from con-artists on arrival at the airport. Avoid unlicensed cabs, but be aware that licensed ones are sometimes prone to tricky dealings. A cab from the airport to the centre should cost around TD4 to TD7 (depending on the time of day – fares cost 50% more from 9pm to 5am). All use a meter, but some cabbies change this to increase the fare – sometimes by as much as TD20. It can also be confusing when you first arrive as the currency has so many digits – for example, a fare of TD3.5 will read 03,500. If you think you have been tricked, argue that the fare should be no more than TD8 to the centre and suggest that the driver double-checks this. If really rattled, you can take the taxi licence number and suggest that you will contact the police.

Scams

Occasionally you'll meet a helpful soul in the medina who will tell you that you're in luck and must hurry to a festival featuring an unmissable celebration of Berber craft. Following them to the festival, you will inevitably end up in an artisan or carpet shop. Even Paul Theroux, the been-everywhere travel writer, got caught out by this one, as he describes in *The Pillars of Hercules*.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The medina's tangled streets contain many major sights, but there's also the fantastic Bardo Museum in a northwest suburb (p50), and the ancient remains of Carthage (p90) and charming Sidi Bou Saïd (p96) outside the city to the north.

Medina

Once the medina was Tunis. It was founded by the Arabs in the 7th century. Nowadays, to go from the new town into its closely knit streets, packed with generations of palaces and monuments, is to enter a different world. The medina at Tunis is a listed Unesco World Heritage site.

A maze of tunnels and alleys dotted with hidden mansions, the medina's architecture is ideal for the climate, as the narrow streets are cool in summer and warm in winter. As space ran out, residents built upwards, constructing vaults and rooms above the streets. This gives the central lanes a subterranean feel, with shafts of sunlight filtering through. Apparently the vaults had to be built high enough to accommodate a loaded camel.

In the 19th century, the French developed the Ville Nouvelle, depriving the medina of its role. The city's great families began to leave their ancestral homes for suburban seaside pads, and the medina

declined, housing rural people settling in the capital. *Zaouias* (the complexes surrounding a tomb of a saint) and palaces were converted to cope with the new arrivals. Today, less than 15,000 people live here, and the main trade is in souvenirs.

Large parts of the northern section were demolished in the 1930s and 1940s to clear the slums and improve vehicle access. Fortunately, the demolition days are long finished, and several organisations are devoted to conservation. The medina's most spruced-up area lies near Place du Gouvernement.

The arteries around the Zaytouna Mosque are packed with souvenir shops (with lots of lovely things to buy as well as trash). Away from these you will find arched winding streets, backstreet workshops, local markets and children playing football.

ZAYTOUNA (GREAT) MOSQUE

Everything in the medina leads to or from the **Zaytouna Mosque** (Map pp72-3; admission TD2; ☎ non-Muslims 8am-2.30pm Thu-Tue). Zaytouna means 'olive tree' – it's said the founder, Hassan Ibn Nooman, conqueror of Byzantine Carthage, held lessons under a tree here.

Entering, it's impossible not to be awed by the calm of the open space after the busy souqs.

STEAM & SOCIABILITY

Three things, the older they are, the better they are: the well, the *hammam* and the friend.
Arab proverb

You haven't fully experienced Tunisia until you've been scrubbed down with an oven scourer by an enthusiastic elderly masseur. The oldest and most atmospheric *hammams* (public bathhouses) are in the medina, keeping residents steamed and cleaned. Often recognisable by their candy-striped red-and-green doorways and undecorated domes, they feel as if they haven't changed (or been cleaned) for hundreds of years. It's an amazingly exotic, sensual and relaxing experience. You'll need a towel, and you might want a scrubbing mitt, shampoo and soap. To avoid undue attention, be aware that people don't bathe naked, but wear their underwear (men wear shorts). It usually costs TD1, while a massage costs another TD1. There are bucketloads to choose from, but the following are all favourites:

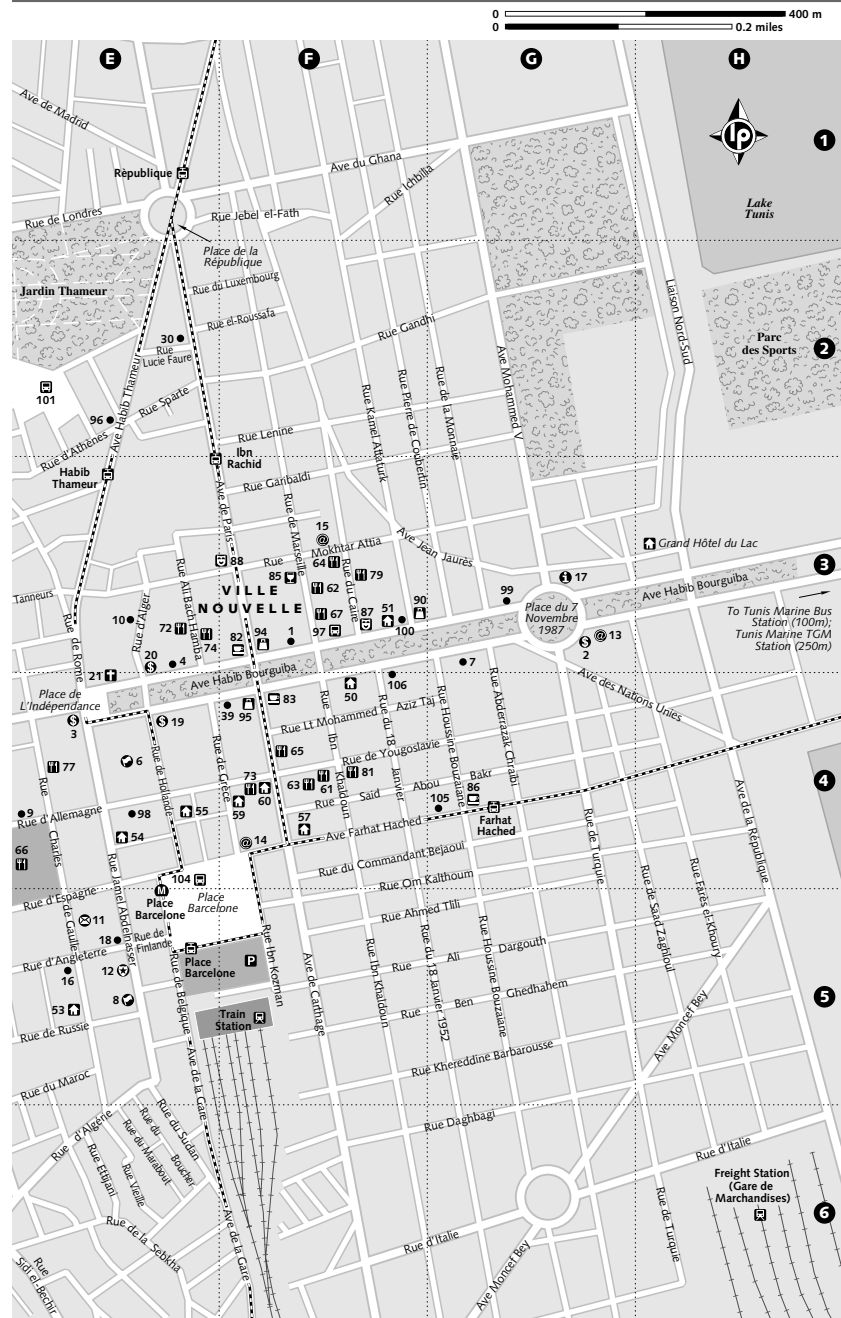
El-Kachachine (Map pp72-3; 30 Souq des Libraires) One of the medina's finest; men only.

El-Methihra (Map pp72-3; 11 rue el-Methira) Friendly, ancient, small scale and tiled, with lots of places to lie down and recuperate. Women bathe in the afternoons, men in the evenings.

Sahib (Map pp72-3; place Halfaouine) This *hammam*, with echoing domed rooms, glorious and dilapidated, was immortalised in the film *Halfaouine*. Women bathe in the afternoons, men in the evenings.

Zitouni (Map pp72-3; rue des Juges) Women-only, clean, with a good hot room; it's newer and fresher than the others.

TUNIS MEDINA, HALFAOUINE & VILLE NOUVELLE



INFORMATION		Tourbet el-Bey.....	42	C6	Neptune.....	79	F3	
Al-Kitab.....	1	F3	Zaouia of Sidi Mahres.....	43	B2	Restaurante Les 3 Étoiles.....	80	D4
Amen.....	2	G3	Zaouia Sidi Kacem Ezzilizi.....	44	A6	Tontonville.....	81	F4
Banque de l'Habitat.....	(see 94)		Zaytouna (Great) Mosque.....	45	C5			
BIAT.....	3	E4	Zitouni Hammam.....	46	C6			
Carthage Tours.....	4	E3				DRINKING ☞		
Espace Diwan 9.....	5	C4	SLEEPING ☞			Bar Jamaica.....	82	F3
French Embassy.....	6	E4	Auberger de Jeunesse.....	47	B4	Brasserie Les 2 Avenues.....	(see 82)	
Interior Ministry.....	7	G3	Dar El-Medina.....	48	B4	Café Chaoechin.....	(see 28)	
Italian Embassy.....	8	E5	Grand Hôtel de France.....	49	D4	Café de Paris.....	83	F4
Lavarie Tahar.....	9	E4	Hôtel Africa.....	50	F4	Café Ez-Zitouna.....	84	C4
Librairie Claire Fontaine.....	10	E3	Hôtel Carlton.....	51	F3	Oscars.....	85	F3
Main Post Office.....	11	E5	Hôtel de la Medina.....	52	D4	Théâtre de l'Etoile du Nord.....	86	G4
Police.....	12	E5	Hôtel de l'Agriculture.....	53	E5			
Publinet.....	13	G3	Hôtel de Suisse.....	54	E4	ENTERTAINMENT ☞		
Publinet.....	14	F4	Hôtel Excel.....	(see 51)		La Pamasse.....	87	F3
Publinet.....	15	F3	Hôtel Maison Dorée.....	55	E4	Le Colisée.....	(see 94)	
Second-hand Bookshop.....	16	E5	Hôtel Marhaba.....	56	D4	Maison de la Culture Ibn		
Tourist Office.....	17	G3	Hôtel Omrane.....	57	F4	Khaldoun.....	88	F3
Tunisia Telecom.....	18	E5	Hôtel rue de Russie.....	58	D5	Théâtre d'Art Ben Abdallah.....	89	D6
UBCI.....	19	E4	Hôtel Salammbô.....	59	F4			
UIB.....	20	E3	Hôtel Transatlantique.....	60	F4	SHOPPING ☞		
						Antique Shop.....	90	F3
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES			EATING ☞			Delma.....	91	D4
Cathedral of St Vincent de Paul.....	21	E4	Abid.....	61	F4	Hanout Arab.....	92	C4
Dar Ben Abdallah Museum.....	22	D6	Al-Mazar.....	(see 67)		Labedi Apiculture.....	93	B4
Dar el-Bey.....	23	B4	Andalous.....	62	F3	Mains des Femmes.....	94	F3
Dar Lasram.....	24	B3	Bohero.....	63	F4	Société de Commercialisation des		
Dar Othman.....	25	D5	Café de Paris Brasserie.....	(see 83)		Produits de l'Artisanats		
El-Kachachine Hammam.....	26	C5	Capitole.....	(see 83)		(SOCOPA).....	95	F4
El-Methihra Hammam.....	27	C5	Capri.....	64	F3			
Grand Souq des Chechias.....	28	B4	Carcassonne.....	65	F4	TRANSPORT		
Hamuda Pasha Mosque.....	29	C4	Central Market.....	66	E4	Air France.....	96	E2
Hôtel Majestic.....	30	E2	Chez Nous.....	67	F3	Bus to Airport (35).....	97	F3
Kasbah Mosque.....	31	B5	Dar Bel Hadj.....	68	C4	Compagnie Tunisienne de Navigation		
Medersa Bachia.....	32	C5	Dar el-Jeld.....	69	B4	(CTN).....	98	E4
Medersa Mouradia.....	33	C5	Dar Hamouda Pacha.....	70	B4	EgyptAir.....	(see 82)	
Medersa Palmier.....	34	C5	Fast Food.....	71	B3	Europcar.....	99	G3
Medersa Slimania.....	35	C5	Le Carthage.....	72	E3	Hertz.....	100	F3
Mosque of Sidi Mahres.....	36	B2	Le Malouf.....	73	F4	Jardin Thameur Bus Station.....	101	E2
Mosque of the Dyers.....	37	D5	L'Orient.....	74	E3	Louages for Algeria.....	102	D5
Mosque of Youssef Dey.....	38	B5	Magasin Général.....	75	D4	Louages to Libya.....	103	D5
National Theatre.....	39	F4	Mahdaoui.....	76	C4	Place Barcelone Bus Station.....	104	E4
Palais Khereddine.....	40	B3	Margaritas.....	(see 55)		SNCM.....	105	G4
Sahib El-Tabia Mosque.....	41	A1	Monoprix.....	77	E4	Tunisair.....	106	F4
Sahib Hammam.....	(see 41)		M'Rabet.....	78	C4	Tunisiana.....	(see 106)	

Dating from various eras, the building's remarkably harmonious. The first mosque here was built in AD 734, but it was rebuilt in the 9th century by the Aghlabid ruler Ibrahim ibn Ahmed (AD 856–63), and resembles the Great Mosque in Kairouan in design. The builders recycled 184 columns from Roman Carthage for the central prayer hall. The adjoining prayer room is 9th century. The dome, with its patterned red-and-white brickwork, shows a European – even Byzantine – influence, while the minaret dates from the 19th century.

The mosque's theological faculty was a hugely important Islamic university until it was closed down by President Bourguiba after independence to try to reduce the

social influence of religion. The faculty was re-opened in 1987.

Non-Muslims are allowed in as far as the courtyard. Nearby shops allow views of the mosque from their roof terraces, though sometimes you also have to face a hard sell on the way back through the shop.

OTHER MOSQUES

There are mosques all over the medina; interiors are off-limits to non-Muslims. Some of the finest are listed here.

Kasbah Mosque (Map pp72-3; place de la Kasbah) dates from 1235 and was once within the Hafsid citadel, which no longer stands. The minaret's lozenge design pays tribute to Moroccan style, purposefully showing the

Hafsids' links with the Almohad strand of Islam. It was hugely influential, serving as a model for the Zaytouna Mosque minaret. The call to prayer is quietly signalled by a white flag.

Mosque of Youssef Dey (Map pp72-3; Souq el-Berka) was Tunis' first Ottoman-style mosque (1616), designed by Andalusian architect Ibn Ghalib in a colourful mishmash of styles. It was surrounded by Turkish souqs – El-Trouk (tailors), El-Berka (slaves) and El-Bechamkia (slippers) and catered to the Turkish traders. Look out for the minaret crowned with a miniature green-tiled pyramid – this was the first, much-copied octagonal minaret in Tunis, serving as propaganda for the new masters. The mosque contains the tombs of Youssef Dey and his family – another innovative Ottoman custom.

Hamuda Pasha Mosque (Map pp72-3; rue Sidi ben Arous) is a 17th-century, harmonious, richly decorated building that reflects the prosperity of the times. Its witch's-hat minaret is octagonal – typical of the Turkish Hanefite strand of Islam.

Mosque of Sidi Mahres (Map pp72-3; rue Sidi Mahres), built in 1692, is named after Tunis' patron saint, who saved the city after it was captured by Abu Yazd during a rebellion against Fatimid rule in AD 944. He also allowed Jews to settle within the walls, and reorganised the souqs. His tomb lies opposite the entrance, in the **Zaouia of Sidi Mahres**. The mosque is ranked as one of the city's finest Ottoman buildings, with a cluster of white domes resembling a heap of eggs. But there's something missing. It's the minaret – never added as the project ran into difficulties following 17th-century political upheaval. Women come here to pray to be endowed with a husband or children. The surrounding busy local souqs are an interesting place for a wander and for picking up cheap pottery.

Mosque of the Dyers (Map pp72-3; rue des Teinturiers) was built in 1716 by Hussein ben Ali, founder of the Husseinite line of beys (provincial governors). It has an adjoining *medersa* (Quranic school), and another Ottoman octagonal minaret. Hussein buried two holy men in the mausoleum, leaving a space between them for his own tomb, but his nephew Ali Pasha drove him from power and buried his own father in Hussein's spot.

Sahib El-Tabia Mosque (Map pp72-3; place Halfaouine) dates from the 19th century, when Halfaouine was an emerging fashionable quarter. It forms part of Tunis' only *külliyé* – a *medersa*, souq, *hammam* and tomb complex. It's almost Venetian looking; the railings and black marble were imported from the continent. The minaret was only added in 1970.

MEDERSAS

Medersas are schools for study of the Quran. They declined in the late 19th century when broader education came into vogue. The following fine examples – mostly still used as schools – are clustered around the Zaytouna Mosque.

With an ornately studded door, the **Medersa Mouradia** (Map pp72-3; 37 Souq Etouffes; admission free; ☞ 9am-4.30pm Mon-Sat Sep-Jun) was built in 1673 by Mourad II, son of Husseinite bey Ali Pasha, on the ruins of a Turkish barracks destroyed during a rebellion. It's used to train apprentices in traditional crafts.

Medersa Palmier (Map pp72-3; 11 Souq des Libraires; ☞ closed to public), still a Quranic school, was constructed in 1714 on the site of a *funduq* (travellers' inn) and named after a long-gone tree. Identify it by its yellow studded door.

Ali Pasha built **Medersa Slimania** (Map pp72-3; cnr Souq des Libraires & Souq el-Kachachine; ☞ 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Sat) in 1754, a marvel of stucco and tiling, to commemorate his son Suleiman, poisoned by his brother. Once a Quranic school for girls, it now houses an association of former students.

The 1752 **Medersa Bachia** (Map pp72-3; 19 Souq des Libraires) has what was once a small public fountain beside the entrance. Also constructed by Ali Pasha, it now houses an artisans' school.

SOUQS

The medina markets were organised into different commercial areas. Refined trades surrounded the Zaytouna Mosque, while dirtier businesses such as tanners or blacksmiths stayed on the outskirts. The markets are either named after their traditional trade or their founding community, such as **Souq el-Grana** – the Livornese Jews' Souq.

The main markets include the **Souq el-Attarine** – the Perfume Makers' Souq, dating from the 13th century, near the Zaytouna Mosque. Today it's largely souvenirs, but

there are plenty of essential oils too. The quilted satin baskets on sale are for wedding gifts. Also leading from the mosque is the 13th-century **Souq des Libraires**, the Booksellers' Souq, lined with *medersas* and a *hammam* (p71).

Souq el-Attarine leads into the **Souq el-Trouk**, the Turkish Souq – traditionally the tailors' souq, and still selling some outfits among the souvenirs.

Souq Étouffes runs alongside the mosque, and was once the elegant cloth market, wide, with green-and-red striped columns; it still sells cloth and clothes.

Also close to the mosque, the narrow **Souq de la Laine**, the Wool Souq, is now packed with silver shops. North of here, barrel-vaulted **Souq el-Berka** dates from Ottoman times: this was the slave souq where prisoners of Muslim corsairs (pirates) were brought, sometimes from the prison at La Goulette, to be sold from a wooden block. When piracy dwindled, the human market was supplied by sub-Saharan Africa. The trade was abolished in 1846 and it's now a goldsmith's market.

One of the biggest souqs is the **Grand Souq des Chechias** (Map pp72–3), northeast of the mosque, where dusty shopfronts are brimful with blood-red hats, and you can see them being shaped and hammered. In the 17th century, this was one of Tunisia's biggest industries. A million red-felt skull-caps, used originally as the basis for building a turban, were made annually by 15,000 craftsmen, and exported worldwide.

MUSEUMS, MAUSOLEUMS, MONUMENTS & PALACES

Bab Bhar, also called the Porte de France or French Gate, is a huge freestanding arch that was the medina's eastern gateway until the surrounding walls were demolished by the French to create place de la Victoire.

The **Tourbet el-Bey** (Map pp72–3; admission TD2, plus camera TD1; ☎ 9.30am–4.30pm) has the green fish-scale domes typical of mausoleums. Inside is a mishmash of tiles and intricate stucco, built during Ali Pasha II's reign (1758–82). Many subsequent Husseinite beys, princesses, ministers and trusted advisers ended up here. The male tombs are topped with strange, anonymous marble renditions of their preferred headgear, be it turban or *chechia* (small, red, felt hat), with

the number of tassels showing their importance. The enthusiastic, French-speaking guardian is knowledgeable.

Built in 1796, one of the medina's finest former palaces houses the **Dar Ben Abdallah Museum** (Centre for Popular Arts & Traditions; Map pp72–3; Impasse Ben Abdallah; admission TD2, plus camera TD1; ☎ 9.30am–4.30pm Mon–Sat), a chance to imagine how the wealthy lived within the medina. It belonged to a high-ranking officer, and had a 19th-century makeover in fashionable Italianate style. Four of the rooms have been used to create scenes of 19th-century bourgeois life, including tea drinking and wedding preparations. There's a café opposite, see p84.

Dar Lasram (Map pp72–3; 24 rue de Tribunal; admission free; ☎ 8.30am–1pm & 3–5.30pm Mon–Sat) is another magnificent mansion. From the 18th century, the Lasram family provided the beys with scribes. Today it's home to the Association de Sauvegarde de la Medina, which oversees medina conservation. The interior has magnificent intensely tiled rooms and courtyards, and medina maps, plans and photographs.

Palais Khereddine (Map pp72–3; ☎ 564 110; place du Tribunal; admission free; ☎ 10am–7pm Mon–Sat) is on a pretty, palm-shaded square. This 19th-century palace, later split to house two schools – one for Jews, one for Muslims – is grandly named the Museum of Tunis, and hosts some excellent free, art exhibitions.

Dar Othman (Map pp72–3; rue el-M'Bazz) was built by Othman Dey in the early 17th century. His business – piracy – was obviously lucrative, and he also happened to be Governor of Tunis. The palace is a wonderful example of period architecture, distinguished by its exuberantly busy façade. Some rooms are now offices (some to the Conservation de la Medina organisation), but you are welcome to visit the courtyards. The unusual interior garden was planted in 1936.

Dar el-Bey (Map pp72–3; Place du Gouvernement; ☎ closed to public) was the Husseinite rulers' city pad, but the beys preferred the Bardo, so it was used as an official guesthouse until 1881, when the French arrived.

Zaouia Sidi Kacem Ezzilizi (Map pp72–3; rue Sidi el Jelizi; ☎ 8am–6pm Tue–Sun) is the tomb of an Andalusian craftsman who's credited with bringing tile-making to Tunis. The restored building has some beautiful Tunisian ceramics, ranging from medieval to modern.

Ville Nouvelle

The Ville Nouvelle is an entirely different city, with tall shuttered windows, wrought-iron balconies, cafés and pâtisseries. There are some fine examples of colonial architecture, ranging from the exuberant to the bizarre.

Cathedral of St Vincent de Paul (Map pp72–3; place de l'Indépendance) sits comfortably in the bizarre camp. This custard-coloured 1883 cathedral melds Gothic, Byzantine and Moorish elements. There are regular masses in French and Italian and it's open variable hours.

The **statue** opposite the cathedral is of Ibn Khaldun, the great Tunis-born Islamic teacher and philosopher – many of his ideas, such as the cyclical nature of history, were way ahead of his time.

Fabulously ornate façades dot the city. Supreme examples include the Art Nouveau **National Theatre** (Map pp72–3; ave Habib Bourguiba), built by the French in 1902, which has a meringue-sculpted frontage that looks as if you could crack it off and eat it. The **Hôtel Majestic** (Map pp72–3; 36 ave de Paris) is another splendid almost-edible confection – currently closed for renovation, though not a lot seems to be happening.

Other grand structures, such as the neo-classical **main post office** (Map pp72–3; rue Charles de Gaulle), built in 1893, and **French embassy** (Map pp72–3; place de l'Indépendance, ave Habib Bourguiba), built in 1856, were designed for the colonial power to assert its authority.

Resembling a much younger cousin of London's Big Ben, a burnished metal **clock tower** forms a glimmering landmark towards the western end of ave Habib Bourguiba. It was erected to commemorate Independence Day (7 November).

Beaches

Access the Tunis beaches via TGM from Tunis Marine station (Map p68). La Marsa is the best, and less crowded than those at La Goulette, Sidi Bou Saïd and Carthage (but note the patch nearest the president's palace at Carthage is quite pristine).

Thalassotherapy

Thalassotherapy is Greek for sea treatment, and describes a range of therapies that use seawater to detoxify and relieve joint pain. Near Tunis you can indulge in myriad

treatments at reasonable prices at the La Residence's luxurious spa (see p99).

WALKING TOUR

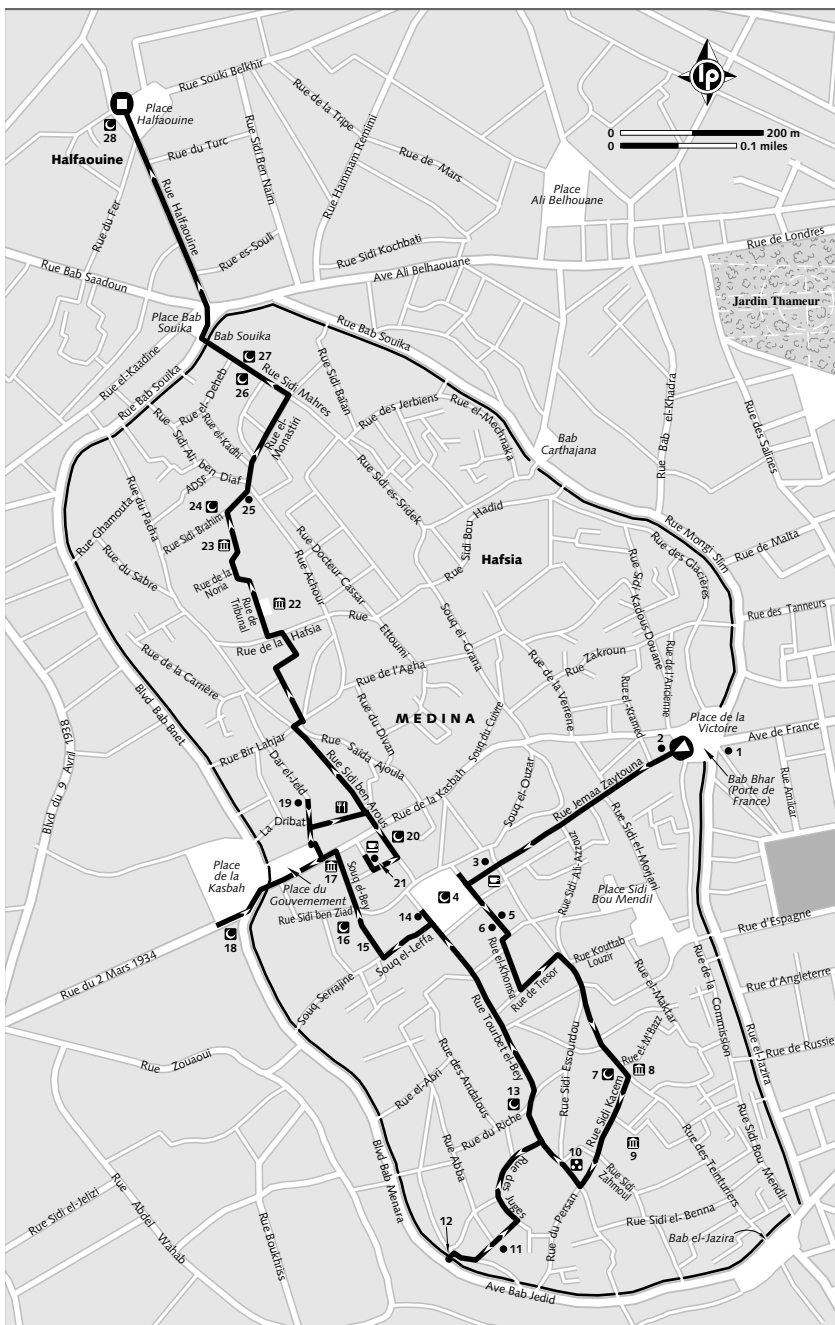
This tour takes in the medina's main sights, and the area's best cafés are marked on the map so you can stop for breaks on the way.

Start at the **Bab Bhar (1)**; opposite). Note rue des Glacières, leading off right – this is where huge blocks of Alpine ice for sale were stored in the 18th and 19th centuries. To the left of the road, on the square, is the **former British Embassy (2)**, used for filming scenes from the *English Patient*. The embassy moved to a more secure setting in 2004. From here head along rue Jemaa Zaytouna, the main tourist drag, where nestled between the stuffed camels are jewellery, ceramics, glassware and eager shopkeepers. Near the top, at number 73, you'll pass the fine **National Library (3)**, once a barracks, built in 1814 by Hamouda Bey to house Berber soldiers who'd been recruited after an Ottoman mutiny. Next, head to the **Zaytouna Mosque (4)**; p71). Amble southwards along **Souq des Libraires (5)**; opposite). The western side is lined with *medersas (6)*; p75) formerly linked to the Zaytouna Mosque theological faculty. Carry on along rue el-Khomsa, packed with carpentry workshops, then turn right at rue de Tresor and go south along rue des Teinturiers – street of the dyers. On the corner is the extravagant **Mosque of the Dyers (7)**; p75).

Opposite, an archway leads to rue el-M'Bazz and **Dar Othman (8)**; opposite).

Bear right along rue Sidi Kacem and you'll hit the **Dar Ben Abdallah Museum (9)**; opposite). Further on are the green fish-scale domes of the **Tourbet el-Bey (10)**; opposite). From here head north along rue Tourbet el-Bey. If you like, make a detour, turning left down rue des Juges, then right along **rue des Forgerons (11)** – the blacksmiths' street – full of noisy dark forges and smoke-blackened workers. A right at the end will take you to **Bab Jedid (12)**, one of three gates built by the Hafids, and the only one still standing.

Retrace your steps back to the main route, following rue Tourbet el-Bey; at No 41 is the **Mosque of M'sed el-Kobba (13)**, aka Kuttab Ibn Khaldoun (a *kuttab* is a Quranic primary school). The famous historian Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406) was born at No 33 and

**WALK FACTS****Start** place de la Victoire**Finish** place Halfaouine**Distance** 2.5km**Duration** two to three hours

taught briefly at the mosque before leaving for Cairo. When you reach the Zaytouna Mosque again, you'll see **Medersa Mouradia** (14; see p75), then turn southwest along Souq el-Leffa. Along this street several shops allow access to their rooftops for great views.

Next, turn north along **Souq el-Berka** (15; p76). You'll see the **Mosque of Youssef Dey** (16; p75). Nose out along Souq el-Bey, with more jewellery shops, and you'll come out at the peaceful Place du Gouvernement, surrounded by government buildings. The **Dar el-Bey** (17; p76), is on the south side, and to the west is place de la Kasbah – the kasbah itself was destroyed by the French in 1883 and all that remains is the **Kasbah Mosque** (18; p74).

Take Dar el-Jeld northwards and you can visit immaculately restored **Le Diwan** (19), an 18th-century mansion that's now an up-market craft shop and banqueting hall. This corner of the medina is particularly kempt, with whitewashed façades, trailing flowers and big studded doors indicating wealthy houses. Nip back up Dar el-Jeld and take a left after its eponymous huge-doored restaurant. Head down the pretty little alley, to reach rue Sidi ben Arous. Turn right. You'll see the **Hamuda Pasha Mosque** (20; p75).

Now, it's time you bought one of those traditional red-felt hats favoured by comedians and elderly men. Turn right into the **Grand Souq des Chechias** (21; p76). After some age-old sales pitch, carry back along rue Sidi ben Arous. When you reach a junction turn right and then almost immediately left, continuing north, following the lanes till you pass **Palais Khereddine** (22; p76), then continue straight, passing **Dar Lasram** (23; p76) on your left. When you reach rue Sidi Brahim, turn right. You will pass the **Zaouia of Sidi Ibrahim Riahi** (24), a Sufi teacher from Testour, on your left. Follow the road straight, passing the 17th-century **Medersa el-Achouria** (25) on your right, until you reach rue Sidi Mahres. Turning left, you will plunge into a street packed with busy local souqs,

surrounding the **Mosque of Sidi Mahres** (26; p75) and **Zaouia of Sidi Mahres** (27; p75). Coming out of the medina onto place Bab Souika, take rue Halfaouine as far as **Sahib El-Tabia Mosque** (28; p75). You are well away from the tourist hordes now, in one of Tunis' most colourful local districts – take the chance to do some aimless wandering.

COURSES**Language****Institut Bourguiba des Langues Vivantes** (Map p69;

☎ 71 832 418; www.iblv.rnu.tn; 47 ave de la Liberté)

Beginners' and advanced courses in Modern and Tunisian Arabic. A one-month course in July or August costs TD480.

Langue Arabe pour Étrangers (Arabic for Foreigners;

☎ 71 845 892; www.arabic-tunisia.freezerservers.com; 6 rue

de Rhodes Mutuelleville) Offers intensive (four hours daily

for 12 days; €350) beginners', intermediate and advanced

Modern Arabic courses all year.

Université Libre de Tunis (ULT; ☎ 71 890 391; www

.ult-eil.org; Faculté des Arts, des Lettres et des Sciences Hu-

maines, 30 ave Kheireddine Pacha) Private university offers

80-/240-hour Modern Arabic courses costing €600/1800.

Dance

During winter, the École Serguei Diaghilev

de Ballet et Danse Classique at the **Centre****Russe** (Map p69; ☎ 71 780 953; ave de la Liberté) gives

lessons in classical and Tunisian dance.

TUNIS FOR CHILDREN

If there's one thing Tunisians like more than

harissa it's children, and having little ones

along with you will ensure you lots of smiles

and local contact. And as Tunis is so laid-

back and small, it's an easy place to be with

kids. There's quick access to beaches if sight-

seeing seems too much like hard work.

The entertaining **Dah Dah Happy Land****Park** (Map p68; ☎ 71 860 888; ave Principal, Berges de

Lac; 1 ticket TD0.5, 12 tickets TD5; ☎ 6pm-1am) is an

amusement park with lots of rides. It's part

of the developing, trendy district of Berges

de Lac, and there's a lively corniche (coastal

road) to wander up and down. A taxi from the

centre costs about TD3.5.

Tunis Zoo (Map p69; ☎ 71 841 540; Parc du Belvedere;

adult/child TD0.5/0.3; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Tue-Sun Oct-Mar, to

7.30pm Apr-Sep) is another child-friendly hit, in

a shady, peaceful park with some interesting

animals including monkeys and colourful

parrots, though cages look cramped.

Children will enjoy the colourful me-

dina souqs, and can be bribed with stuffed

camels, though be aware that the main drags can get very crowded and pushchairs are difficult to manoeuvre (your shoulders are a better option). Some will enjoy a short dose of the **Bardo Museum** (see p50) with its Roman mosaics – the pictures tell stories and feature lots of animals, and the **Dar Ben Abdallah Museum** (p76) with its waxwork figures. A great place is **Sidi Bou Saïd** (p96), with its relaxing pace, marina, beach and elaborate mansions. In Carthage there's a small beach and the **Oceanographic Museum** (p95) with an aquarium. If you stay in either of these tranquil suburbs, you'll have an easy walk to the beach. For more on beaches see p77.

If all else fails, the upmarket hotels usually provide babysitting services.

TOURS

Tours of Tunisia can easily be arranged at the coastal resorts, but are difficult to set up within the city. However, if you want to go on a tour encompassing the medina, Bardo Museum, Carthage and Sidi Bou Saïd (a daunting amount for one day so you be better off by choosing just two of these), contact **Carthage Tours** (Map pp72-3; ☎ 71 344 066; 1st fl, 2 rue Ali Bach Hamba; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Sat), which can arrange a private car for around TD200 with guide for four people. They also arrange a three-day tour to the Sahara (TD230 per person) but be warned that this tour will entail a long drive there and back.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

There's a **medina festival**, featuring live traditional music, during Ramadan (see p292).

Other festivals take place in Carthage (see p95) and Sidi Bou Saïd (see p97). You'll find information about these festivals in the local press or at the tourist office.

SLEEPING

Tunis offers wide-ranging accommodation for all budgets. Most of the top-end places are out of the centre or in the northern suburbs – see under Carthage (p96), Sidi Bou Saïd (p97), La Marsa (p98) and Gammarth (p99) for more details. For apartment rental, see p285.

Medina & Halfaouine

The medina is an exciting place to stay, with an excellent youth hostel and one beautiful

four-star. Otherwise it mainly contains budget hotels, many of which include six-legged friends and a soundtrack of bodily functions in the price.

BUDGET

Auberge de Jeunesse (Map pp72-3; ☎ 71 567 850; 25 rue Es-Saïda Ajoula; dm incl breakfast TD8) In the thick of the medina, this occupies the 18th-century Dar Saïda Ajoula palace and has single-sex dorms. It has plenty of regulations (closed 10am to 2pm, a 10pm curfew, no showers between 7.30pm and 9am). However, it's still a bargain: clean, and the large dorm has fine murals.

Hôtel Marhaba (Map pp72-3; ☎ 71 327 605; 5 rue de la Commission; s/d with shared bathroom TD12/15, tr/q with bathroom TD30/40) With a great medina-side location, this place is central and clean. It has narrow, iron-framed lumpy beds, is always busy (favoured by Tunisian families) and is fine for lone women. Avoid a room close to a bathroom as the acoustics can be unpleasant. Hot showers cost TD1.

Hôtel de la Medina (Map pp72-3; ☎ 71 327 497; 1 rue des Glacières; r with shared bathroom TD15) Many of the spartan, whitewashed, blue-shuttered rooms here have great views over the square. This has a hostel-like feel, is OK for lone women, and has cleanish showers (TD1).

TOP END

Dar El-Medina (Map pp72-3; ☎ 71 563 022; www.darelmedina.com; 64 rue Sidi ben Arous; r TD170, larger r TD220; ☎) There's nowhere like this in Tunis, a converted 19th-century medina mansion. Run by the family who have lived here for generations, it has been beautifully converted, in a simple mix of traditional and contemporary style. All rooms are different. Downstairs includes an elaborately stuccoed and painted salon and the converted kitchen, also now a sitting room. From the multilevel roof terrace you can hear the evening call to prayer echo across the city.

Ville Nouvelle

The Ville Nouvelle contains most of the midrange, faded-colonial French hotels, characterised by tall ceilings, balconies and good value, and there are numerous lush, newer places.

BUDGET

Hôtel de Suisse (Map pp72-3; ☎ 71 323 821; 5 rue de Suisse; s/d with shower TD10/20) The rooms here are spartan but reasonably clean, with showers in a corner alcove. The 1st-floor rooms have balconies so low that you are almost on street level. Don't leave valuables in your room here.

Grand Hôtel de France (Map pp72-3; ☎ 71 326 244; hotelfrance.tunis@yahoo.fr; 8 rue Mustapha Mbarek; s/d with shared bathroom TD17/23, with bathroom TD19/27, with air-con TD24/32; ☎) Airy and light, with lashings of colonial faded elegance, this has tiling details and lots of wrought iron. Ask for a room with balcony – those at the back overlook a leafy inner courtyard.

MIDRANGE

Hôtel Transatlantique (Map pp72-3; ☎ 71 240 680; 106 rue de Yougoslavie; s/d with shared bathroom TD20/28, with private bathroom TD29/35) This hotel is distinguished by elaborate tiling in the reception. The assorted, slightly ramshackle rooms are plain and clean, with high ceilings, shutters and lots of light. Beds are hardish and doubles small.

Hôtel de l'Agriculture (Map pp72-3; ☎ 71 326 394; 25 rue Charles de Gaulle; s/d TD25/35) Rooms here are pokey, but clean and bright, decorated in blue and white, with neat little bathrooms. Management is friendly and there's a *salon de thé* (teahouse) attached.

Hôtel Salammbô (Map pp72-3; ☎ 71 350 732; hotel.salammbô@gnet.tn; 6 rue de Grèce; s with shared shower/private bathroom TD18/30, d with shared/private bathroom TD27/36; ☎) Salammbô has spic-and-span, basic rooms. The cheaper they are, the more stairs you have to climb; pricier rooms have air-conditioning (cheaper ones have a fan). Some have balconies, and staff are friendly and efficient. The double beds are small.

Hôtel Maison Dorée (Map pp72-3; ☎ 71 240 632; 3 rue el-Koufa; s/d with shower TD27.50/35, with private bathroom TD33/43, with air-con TD38/46; ☎) Maison Dorée is charming: simple and spotless with an old-fashioned, French-feeling formality. Most of its rooms (varied in shape and atmosphere; ask to see a couple) have shuttered balconies and comforting, polished-wood, 1950s furnishings; the restaurant is also good.

Hôtel rue de Russie (Map pp72-3; ☎ 71 328 883; 18 rue de Russie; s/d TD35/50; ☎) Despite the unbothered reception, this is good value with

smartish rooms that have busily patterned bathrooms. Ask for one overlooking the street or the interior courtyard.

Hôtel Carlton (Map pp72-3; ☎ 71 330 644; www.hotelcarlton.tunis.com; 31 ave Habib Bourguiba; s/d/tr TD57/83/98; ☎) This small, well-maintained three-star hotel has plain rooms with satellite TV. Spa treatments are available. Rooms at the front have balconies with views over Tunis' main drag.

Hôtel Excel (Map pp72-3; ☎ 71 355 161; 35 ave Habib Bourguiba; s/d with private bathroom TD50/70; ☎) Next door to the Carlton, and similar. Rooms here may not be big but have a nice, fresh feel. Those with views over the busy avenue are best.

Hôtel Omrane (Map pp72-3; ☎ 71 345 277; www.hotel-omrane.com.tn; 65 ave Farhat Hached; s/d TD55/78) Central, a bit characterless, but comfortable, rooms here are smartish if a bit dull, with TV. A cheap favourite for the business crowd.

TOP-END

Hôtel Africa (Map pp72-3; ☎ 71 347 477; 50 ave Habib Bourguiba; d from TD200) The ashtray architecture of the chandelier sets the scene at this glitzy, refurbished business-oriented place, with good views and spacious rooms.

La Maison Blanche (Map p69; ☎ 71 844 718; 45 ave Mohamed V; s/d TD195/220; ☎) A bit out of the way, the White House has a rare amount of character: elaborate furnishings in light, bright rooms with curvaceous windows. The piano bar is darkly Art Deco.

EATING

You can eat well here, and meals out are very good value. Apart from the wide range of central eateries, even more choice can be found in the city's delightful seafront suburbs – Sidi Bou Saïd and Gammarth have some up-market joints with wonderful sea views.

Medina

The medina contains Tunis' grandest restaurants (and daytime hole-in-the-wall places for the hard up), housed in exquisite 18th-century mansions.

BUDGET

Fast Food (Map pp72-3; rue Ettoumi) This popular pocket-sized place does great sandwiches for around TD1.5.

Mahdaoui (Map pp72-3; 2 rue Jema Zaytouna; mains TD3.7-7; ☎ noon-3.30pm Mon-Sat) Central and

THE MEDINA'S BEST CAFÉS

Café Ez-Zitouna (Map pp72-3; rue Jemaa Zaytouna) Beautifully tiled arched rooms, full of fragrant smoke, open to the street.

M'Rabet (Map pp72-3; Souk el-Trouk) Traditional Turkish café, with pillars painted in stick-of-rock stripes, rush-mat seating on raised platforms and an airy courtyard.

Dar Hamouda Pacha (Map pp72-3; rue Sidi ben Arous) Whitewashed alcoves around small, calm courtyards, and mute-coloured sofas, this is the chichi way to smoke your *sheesha* (waterpipe used to smoke tobacco); has good Turkish coffee.

Café Chaoechin (Map pp72-3; Grand Souq des Chechias) The oldest, where *sheeshas* gurgle among the ornate cubby-holes of the hat-makers' souq, with rickety painted tables under tiled arches.

Dar El-Medina (Map pp72-3; 64 rue Sidi ben Arous) Tunis' loveliest hotel (p80) has several salons and a roof terrace where you can take a tea, coffee, fruit juice or *sheesha*.

cheap, here the tables fill a narrow alley by the Zaytouna Mosque. The simple daily menu offers couscous, fish, chicken, lamb (sometimes half a head – yikes) and so on – greasy but pretty good. If you get here late, there won't be much choice left.

MIDRANGE

M'Rabet (Map pp72-3; Souk el-Trouk; mains TD7-12; ☎ noon-3.30pm & 7.30-10pm Mon-Sat) Above the busy traditional café, this is a formal small restaurant with nice views of the Zaytouna Mosque, specialising in Tunisian dishes and mainly catering to groups.

TOP END

Dar Hamouda Pacha (Map pp72-3; ☎ 71 561 746; 56 rue Sidi ben Arous; mains TD13-18; ☎ café 8am-8.30pm, restaurant 8-10.30pm Mon-Sat) This is an intimate, elegant café and restaurant with chairs scattered among white arches and small courtyards hung with old black-and-white photographs. It's popular with well-to-do courting Tunisian couples. Cuisine is Tunisian-French.

Dar Bel Hadj (Map pp72-3; ☎ 71 200 894; 17 rue des Tamis; mains TD18-26; ☎ noon-3pm & 8-10.30pm Mon-Sat) North of the Zaytouna Mosque, this is another grand traditional restaurant in a sumptuous 17th-century mansion, an extraordinary surprise after the medina's

narrow streets. The food is delicious and recommended. Try the Tunisian mixed hors d'oeuvres and the *brochettes de mérrou* (grouper kebabs). The restaurant's golf buggy will pick you up and drop you off from Place de Gouvernement in the evening.

Dar el-Jeld (☎ 71 560 916; 5-10 rue Dar el-Jeld; meals around TD35) This is special from the moment you knock on the grand bee-yellow arched doorway, which opens into an elaborate 18th-century mansion – it's like stepping into a lavishly decorated jewellery box. The magnificent dining room is in a covered central courtyard, with secluded alcove tables around the edge. Start with the mixed hors d'oeuvres, then try delicious traditional Tunisian dishes such as *kabkabou* (fish with tomatoes, capers and olives), all accompanied by the twanging tones of the resident elderly musician.

Ville Nouvelle

BUDGET

Carcassonne (Map pp72-3; 8 ave de Carthage; mains TD1.8-2, 4-course set menu TD4.5; ☎ noon-10pm) Remarkable value is the name of the game at this small, popular, friendly place, with quality traditional food in pleasant, relaxed surroundings. Service is fast.

Restaurante Les 3 Étoiles (Map pp72-3; rue Mustafa M'barek; mains TD2.5-4; ☎ 11.30am-11.30pm) Just by the medina, near Bab Bhar, this is a great basic little place with cheap-as-chips food – fill-you-up couscous or blow-your-top *salade mechouia* (grilled peppers and tomatoes with olive oil and garlic, served garnished with olives or tuna) – whirring fans, plastic tablecloths and satisfied customers.

Neptune (Map pp72-3; ☎ 71 254 820; 3 rue de Caire; dishes TD3.2-7.8; ☎ noon-10pm) With its curvy wrought-iron chairs, Formica tabletops and wicker-framed mirrors that could have been plucked from 1970s suburbia, this chirpy place has simple Tunisian favourites, including fresh fish.

Abid (Map pp72-3; ☎ 71 257 052; 98 rue de Yougoslavie; mains TD3.8-8.5; ☎ 11am-midnight) With busily tiled interior, TV, flickering neon and simple Tunisian staples (specialising in spicy Sfaxian dishes), this is a good-value neighbourhood favourite.

Margaritas (Map pp72-3; ☎ 71 240 632; Hôtel Maison Dorée, 3 rue el-Koufa; 3-course menu TD7.5, mains TD4.5-11.5; ☎ noon-3pm & 7.30-9.30pm Mon-Sat; ☎) You get great service, cooking and value at

this business and tourist favourite: a small hotel restaurant decorated in dusky mauve and dark wood.

Café de Paris Brasserie (Map pp72-3; ☎ 71 240 583; ave Habib Bourguiba; mains TD4-12; ☎ 11.30am-10pm; ☎) A very handy little place (great for kids), with a nice, clean interior and a few outside tables, pizzas, couscous and a varied range of salads, such as Roquefort and walnut. Also serves alcohol.

Capitole (Map pp72-3; ☎ 71 256 601; ave Habib Bourguiba; mains TD5.5-13) This long-standing place has tasty traditional food, served in a slightly flouncy function room, with views over the busy main drag below.

MIDRANGE

Al-Mazar (Map pp72-3; ☎ 71 340 423; 11 rue de Marseille; mains TD4-13.9; ☎ 10am-2am; ☎) As befits a bar cunningly disguised as a restaurant, this is buzzing and convivial; lone women might find it intimidating. With paintings on the walls and big globe lampshades, you might think yourself in Paris. The food is excellent, with special mention going to the *harissa* and to the chocolate mousse.

Capri (Map pp72-3; ☎ 71 257 695; 34 rue Mokhtar Attia; mains TD6-11.8, pizzas TD5.5-7; ☎ noon-11pm; ☎) A bit cramped, with lots of pinewood on two levels, this is a lively place popular with heavily smoking businessmen. It serves alcohol alongside good simple seafood.

Tontonville (Map pp72-3; ☎ 71 253 918; 96 rue de Yougoslavie; mains TD7-12, set menu TD7; ☎ noon-3.30pm & 7-9.30pm Mon-Sat) This buzzing place has plain, no-nonsense décor, heavily curtained from the street, so punters can tuck into the alcohol on offer with impunity. It also has lots of great fish. The *salade mechouia* served with the dishes comes with a kick.

L'Orient (Map pp72-3; ☎ 71 252 061; rue Ali Bach Hamba; dishes TD5-18; ☎ noon-3.30pm & 7-11pm) Clutter, a busy vibe, tall ceilings, brick arches, swords, shells and yellow-and-green swirling tiling all supply a strong Andalusian flavour, matched by the seafood slant of the menu.

Bolero (Map pp72-3; ☎ 71 245 928; 6 Passage el-Guattar; mains TD6.5-14; ☎ noon-3pm & 7.30-9.30pm) Tucked down a seedy alley, this cosy corner with red tablecloths and low lighting is favoured by Tunis businessmen, who retreat here for long lunches to peruse the long wine list. It specialises in grilled meats and seafood and prides itself on its paella.

Le Malouf (Map pp72-3; ☎ 71 254 246; rue de Yougoslavie; mains TD11-26; ☎ 11.30am-3pm & 7pm-midnight Mon-Sat; ☎) If you fancy some pasta, this Italian-owned place is where to head. It's smart, with big artworks decorating the interior and courtyard tables out the front – a charming find in central Tunis. A guitar duo cranks up the atmosphere on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights.

Le Carthage (Map pp72-3; ☎ 71 255 614; 10 rue Ali Bach Hamba; mains TD12-19; ☎ noon-3pm & 7-11pm Mon-Sat; ☎) Heavy on the camp and kitsch statuary, but with prize-winning couscous and specialising in seafood, this is an intimate, popular choice.

Andalous (Map pp72-3; ☎ 71 241 756; 13 rue de Marseille; mains TD13-16.5; ☎ noon-3pm & 5-11pm Mon-Sat; ☎) Dimly lit by ornate lanterns and decorated with carved wooden screens, this has a Moroccan feel, affable waiters and tasty seafood and meat dishes.

Chez Nous (Map pp72-3; ☎ 71 243 043; 5 rue de Marseille; mains TD14-25; ☎ noon-2.30pm & 7.30-10.30pm Mon-Sat; ☎) This feels like an Italian-American mobsters' haunt. Nothing fancy, in a snug back room, but the food is good and there are faded black-and-white photos of faded stars on the walls.

SELF-CATERING

Central market (Map pp72-3; rue Charles de Gaulle; ☎ 6am-3pm) This market dates from the 19th century and is a hugely colourful place to wander and stock up on food, with a mouth-watering selection of cheeses, fresh bread, *harissa*, olives and pickles (surrounding shops sell tempting piles of the same) as well as fruit and veg.

Central supermarkets include **Monoprix** (Map pp72-3; rue Charles de Gaulle; ☎ 8.30am-9pm Mon-Sat, 8.30am-3pm Sun) and the **Magasin Général** (Map pp72-3; ave de France; ☎ 8.30am-9pm Mon-Sat, 8.30am-1pm Sun). Both stock a range of local wines.

Berges du Lac

The burgeoning lakeside Berges de Lac development is a popular evening hangout, with some flashy cafés and restaurants.

La Croisette (☎ 71 963 287; Corniche du Lac, Les Berges du Lac; ☎ noon-midnight) The Berges du Lac development is trendy and prices reflect this, but this popular *salon de thé*-restaurant has a lovely waterside setting, sells anything from ice cream and cakes to pizzas, and is surrounded by fairy lights.

DRINKING

Most city-centre bars are raucous all-male preserves. For more refined nightlife, head out to the northern suburbs (p89). For medina cafés, see the boxed text (p82).

Bar Jamaica (Map pp72-3; Hotel el-Hana International, ave Habib Bourguiba; ☎ 4pm-midnight) Zip up to El-Hana's 10th floor for fabulous views. This small bar is lit with funky blue neon, plays a mix of lounge and pop music, has tables outside, and attracts a mixed crowd of men and women, both Tunisian and foreign.

Brasserie les 2 Avenues (Map pp72-3; Hotel el-Hana International, ave Habib Bourguiba; ☎ 7am-midnight) This has a pavement location for a prime view of the avenue's people parade.

Café de Paris (Map pp72-3; ave Habib Bourguiba; ☎ 6am-midnight) One of the avenue's main people-watching hubs, this has a good mix of men and women and lots of outside tables.

Oscars (Map pp72-3; rue de Marseille) The vaguely cine-themed (perhaps the name refers to the awards ceremony) bar-restaurant upstairs is fun, though not for single women. There's live music and dancers at the weekend.

Piano Bar (Map p69; La Maison Blanche, 45 ave Mohamed V) A good place for a refined, subdued drink, this five-star hotel bar is Art Deco and dark-wood heaven.

Théâtre de l'Étoile du Nord (Map pp72-3; ☎ 71 254 066; www.etoiledunord.org; 41 ave Farhat Hached; ☎ around 8pm) As boho as Tunis gets, this vibrant theatre has a unique artsy café (no alcohol) catering to a mixed crowd of men and women. Lone women will feel comfortable here.

Le Boeuf sur le Toit (☎ 71 764 807; 3 ave Fatouma Bourguiba) Out in the up-and-coming suburb of La Soukra, 'the beef on the roof' is named after a surrealist ballet; it's a restaurant with a dance floor and terrace, and regular DJs, live gigs and Sunday jazz evenings, attracting Tunisia's most cosmopolitan crowd.

ENTERTAINMENT

Théâtre de l'Étoile du Nord (Map pp72-3; ☎ 71 254 066; www.etoiledunord.org; 41 ave Farhat Hached; admission around TD3; ☎ 8pm) This is a fringe theatre housed in an ex-garage. There are regular plays (in French and Arabic) and concerts (from reggae to heavy metal) – check the website for forthcoming events.

Théâtre d'Art Ben Abdallah (Map pp72-3; ☎ 20 443 540; Space 06 Impasse Ben Abdallah; ☎ 9am-8pm)

This venue, in the converted stables of the Dar Ben Abdallah Museum, has theatre and cinema performances in French and Tunisian and a small café.

There are plenty of cinemas, mainly showing Egyptian films, Bollywood-style action movies or soft porn, but you'll also find recent Hollywood offerings, dubbed into French. The local press has listings. Admission costs around TD3 at plush places such as **La Parnasse** (Map pp72-3; ☎ 71 353 513; 63 ave Habib Bourguiba) and **Le Colisée** (Map pp72-3; ☎ 71 252 057; 45 ave Habib Bourguiba), though older films are often cheaper. The only arthouse cinema is **Maison de la Culture Ibn Khaldoun** (Map pp72-3; ☎ 71 241 901; 16 rue Ibn Khaldoun).

There's traditional live music on offer at restaurants such as Le Malouf (p83) and Lucullus (p90). The upstairs bar at Oscars (left) has lively weekend entertainment. Look out for classical music concerts at the Dar Ennejma Ezzahra (Centre of Arabic & Mediterranean Music; p96) in Sidi Bou Saïd and at L'Acropolis (p93) in Carthage. Big stars dazzle at Carthage's amphitheatre during the International Festival (see p95).

Wealthy Tunisians and tourists are most likely to be getting down at any of Tunis' clubs. The best are out in the northern suburb of La Marsa: try the club at the Hôtel Plaza Corniche (p99).

Villa Didon (p96), in Carthage, has a great bar with superb views. It cranks it up on Friday night, with DJs till 1am, when you'll need to reserve a table and be prepared to spend pots of cash.

Sport

Five of the 14 soccer teams in the Tunisian first division are from Tunis, including rivals Club Africain and Espérance Sportive de Tunisie. Both use **Stade Olympique** (Map p68; El-Menzah) as a home ground. Admission starts at TD7 and matches are usually at 2pm on Sunday. To get there, take *métro léger* line 2 from République to Cité Sportive.

Fixture details are in the Saturday press. Teams are referred to by their initials – CA for Club Africain, and EST for Espérance Sportive de Tunisie. Other Tunis clubs include Stade Tunisien (ST) and Club Olympique de Transports (COT) from the west; Avenir Sportif de La Marsa (ASM) from La Marsa; and Club Sportif de Hammam Lif (CSHL), from the south.

THE PLO IN TUNISIA

Yasser Arafat set up his Tunisian headquarters in 1982, after the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) were expelled from Lebanon by the Israeli army.

Arafat & co – including Mahmoud Abbas, current PLO chief – were warmly greeted by President Habib Bourguiba despite Tunisia's moderate policy on Israel and misgivings regarding the PLO's activities, and they set up headquarters at Borj Cedria near Tunis.

The Tunisian government promised that they would not interfere in Palestinian affairs, and this policy held, even when, following terrorist attacks, Israel retaliated by bombing the Tunisian base. The PLO had agreed not to launch attacks from Tunisia, but then blatantly broke their promise when they seized the Italian *Achille Lauro* cruise ship, killing a wheelchair-bound passenger. Relations between guests and hosts were rocky after this, but recovered and, in 1988, the PLO renounced terrorism and recognised Israel. After this change in policy 70 countries recognised the PLO as the leaders of the Palestinian Arabs and Arafat's prospects began to look up.

Arafat returned to Gaza in 1994, following the Oslo peace accords. Others who opposed the peace settlement, such as hardliner Farouk Kaddoumi (a founder of the PLO) stayed in Tunisia, where he still lives – he became head of Fatah, Arafat's political organisation, after Arafat's death.

Leila Ben Ali, the Tunisian president's wife, is a close personal friend of Suha Arafat, the PLO leader's wealthy widow. The couple had married secretly in Tunis when she was aged 28 (he was 61). Following the many accusations of corruption among the PLO's high ranks, the pair became embroiled in controversy about alleged multimillion-dollar transfers into Mrs Arafat's bank account, who was – some said – paid \$100,000 a month to maintain herself and her daughter. Today, Suha Arafat divides her time between Tunis and Paris, owns shares in Tunisiana, the Tunisia mobile communications company, and recently adamantly denied rumours that she had remarried (Leila Ben Ali's brother).

SHOPPING

The medina is the best place to shop – for information about the souqs see p75. Prices can start ludicrously high, so put on your haggle hat.

Delma (Map pp72-3; 24 ave de France) Impress your date with dates. This upmarket shop sells Tamerza dates stuffed with pistachio paste or dried apricots, or covered in sesame seeds. They're pricier than you'll find in the supermarket but the boxes make good gifts (0.5kg for TD15).

Société de Commercialisation des Produits de l'Artisanats (SOCOPA; Map pp72-3; La Palmarium, ave Habib Bourguiba; ☎ 9am-7.30pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun, 8am-11pm, 4.30-8.30pm Sat Sep-Jun; daily Jul & Aug) The government emporium sells good-quality, fixed-price crafts, including ceramics, rugs and silver jewellery. Get an idea of costs here before heading into the medina.

Mains des Femmes (Map pp72-3; 1st fl, 47 ave Habib Bourguiba; ☎ 8.30am-2.30pm Mon-Sat Jul & Aug, 9am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-noon & 3-6pm Sat Sep-Jun) This shop is the fixed-price outlet for handicrafts produced by rural women's cooperatives, with rugs, including kilims and *mergoums*

(woven carpets with geometric designs) and embroidered blankets.

Hanout Arab (Map pp72-3; 52 rue Jemaa Zaytouna; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat) On the main tourist drag, this is an unusual, fixed-price shop with distinctive Tunisian crafts, including textiles, jewellery and ochre-and-black Sejname pottery.

Fella (Map p69; ☎ 785 924; 9 place Pasteur; ☎ 9am-noon & 3.30-6pm Mon-Sat) This small fixed-price chichi boutique has kept stars from Umm Kolthum to Grace Kelly in handmade floaty robes and household ornaments.

Central Market (Map pp72-3; rue Charles de Gaulle; ☎ 6am-3pm) In and around the busy food market, you can buy excellent olives, olive oil, *harissa* and pickles, as well as a wide range of basketware.

Antique Shop (Map pp72-3; 27 ave Habib Bourguiba) This not-signed antiques shop may seem singularly uninterested in selling anything, but they do have classy antiques at prices to match.

Labedi Apiculture (Map pp72-3; 38 rue Sidi ben Arous) A fascinating shop, this sells local bee products, including eucalyptus honey, royal jelly hand cream and aromatic hair oils.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Tuninter (☎ 71 942 323, 754 000; www.tuninter.com.tn) flies direct to Jerba (TD85) and Tozeur (TD66). Getting a booking in the middle of summer can be hard. Buy tickets from **Tunisair** (Map pp72-3; ☎ 71 330 100; 48 ave Habib Bourguiba), at the airport, from travel agents, or direct from Tuninter.

For details of international flights to/from Tunis, see p302.

Airline offices in Tunis include the following:

Air France (Map pp72-3; ☎ 71 105 324; www.airfrance.com; 1 rue d'Athènes)

Alitalia (☎ 71 767 722; www.alitalia.com; Tunis-Carthage Airport)

British Airways (☎ 71 963 120; www.british-airways.com; rue du Lac Michigan, 1053 Berges du Lac)

EgyptAir (Map pp72-3; ☎ 71 341 182; 1st fl, Complexe el-Hana International, 49 ave Habib Bourguiba)

Lufthansa Airlines (☎ 71 751 096; www.lufthansa.com; Tunis-Carthage Airport)

Royal Air Maroc (☎ 71 845 700; www.royalairmaroc.com; 6 ave Kheireddine Pacha, 1073 Montplaisir)

Tunisair (Map pp72-3; ☎ 71 330 100; 48 ave Habib Bourguiba)

Boat

Ferries from Europe arrive at La Goulette, at the eastern end of the causeway across Lake Tunis. A taxi to the city centre costs about TD4. This is a good investment as it's quite a long walk from here to La Goulette Vieille station.

In summer, reserve tickets from Europe as early as possible, especially if you want to take a vehicle.

The **Compagnie Tunisienne de Navigation** (CTN; Map pp72-3; ☎ 71 322 802; 122 rue de Yougoslavie) handles tickets for ferries operated by CTN and its French partner SNCM to Genoa and Marseilles. **Carthage Tours** (Map pp72-3; ☎ 71 344 066; 59 ave Habib Bourguiba) sells tickets for Tirrenia Navigazione to Trapani, Naples and La Spezia.

See p306 for more details.

Bus

Tunis has two intercity bus stations – one for buses south and the other for buses north.

French-language *La Presse* carries details of SNTRI departures from both stations daily, but these schedules list only final destinations and not the stops en route.

SOUTHERN BUS STATION

All the buses that head to destinations in southern Tunisia leave from the **southern bus station** (Map p69; ☎ 71 399 391, 399 440; Gare Routière Sud de Bab el-Fellah), which is situated south of the city centre opposite the huge Jellaz Cemetery. You can walk, or you could catch *métro léger* line 1 to Bab Alioua, 200m from the bus station.

Destination	Fare (TD)	Duration	Frequency (per day)
Ben Guerdane	24.4	8hr	3
Douz	24.1	8hr	3
El-Haouaria	4.5	2hr	7
El-Jem	10	3hr	6
Gabès	16.3	6½hr	10
Gafsa	16.6	5hr	8
Hammamet	3.45	50 mins-1¼hr	half-hourly
Jerba	21.3	8hr	3
Kairouan	7.5	3hr	hourly
Korba	3.1	3½hr	3
Makthar	7.2	3hr	7
Matmata	18.6	8 hr	1
Medenine	20	7hr	5
Nabeul	2.9/3.4	1½hr	half-hourly
Nefta	21.5	7hrs	2
Sbeitla	10.5	4hr	7
Sfax	12.5	5hr	8
Sousse	7.7	2½hr	8
Tamerza	21.1	7hrs	3
Tataouine	21.25	8hr	3
Tozeur	20.75	7hr	5
Zaghuan	2.4	1¼hr	14

NORTHERN BUS STATION

Buses north leave from the **northern bus station** (Map p69; ☎ 71 562 299, 563 653; Gare Routière Nord de Bab Saadoun), about 2km northwest of the city centre.

The easiest way to get there is by *métro léger* line 4 to Bouchoucha station, which is about 150m west of the bus station on blvd 20 Mars 1956.

Destination	Fare (TD)	Duration	Frequency (per day)
Ain Draham	10	4hr	4
Bizerte	3.4	1hr	half-hourly
Jendouba	7	3hr	6
Le Kef	9	3hr	hourly
Tabarka	8.5	3½hr	6
Teboursouk	6	2½hr	hourly

Car

All the major car-hire companies have offices at the airport and in town. For details of rates, see p310.

Avis (rue 8612, Impasse 4, Chargaia; ☎ 71 205 347; avis@planet.tn)

Europcar (☎ 71 340 303; ☎ 8am-12.45pm & 2-7pm, to 1pm Jul & Aug) ave Habib Bourguiba (Map pp72-3; 17 ave Habib Bourguiba); ave de la Liberté (Map p69; 99 ave de la Liberté)

Hertz (Map pp72-3; ☎ 71 256 451; 29 ave Habib Bourguiba; ☎ 8am-1pm & 2-7pm Mon-Sat)

Topcar (Map p69; ☎ 71 800 875; www.topcartunisie.com; 7 rue de Mahdia)

Louage

Tunis has three main louage (shared taxi) stations. Cap Bon louages leave from opposite the southern bus station, and services to other southern destinations leave from the station at the eastern end of rue El-Aid el-Jebbari, off ave Moncef Bey. Louages to the north leave near the northern bus station.

The **louage station** (place Sidi Bou Mendil) in the medina serves Libya (Tripoli, TD40, 20 hours); services to Algeria leave from nearby. Prices are usually equivalent to bus fares.

Train

Trains leave from **Tunis Ville train station** (Map pp72-3; ☎ 71 345 511; www.snctf.com.tn; place Barcelone). Trains get crowded in summer, especially going south, and to nab a seat, it's a good idea to reserve the day before. There's a discount of 15% on return tickets.

Destination	Fare (2nd/1st/confort)	Duration	Frequency (per day)
Bizerte	3.4	1¼hr	3-4
El Jem	8.9/11.8/12.5	3hr	6
Gabès	15.4/20.7/22.1	6hr	4
Gafsa	14.4/19.3/20.5	7½hr	2
Ghardimao	8.9/11.8/11.2	3hr	4
Hammamet	3.8/5/5.3	1-1½hr	9*
Jendouba	6.8/8.5/9.1	2¾hr	5
Kalaat Kasba	7.9/12.9	5hr	2
Mahdia	8.9/11.8/12.5	4hr	1
Metlaoui	15.4/20.7/22.1	8½hr	2
Monastir	7.9/10.4/11	3hr	1
Nabeul	3.8/5/5.3	1¼-1½hr	9*
Sfax	10.5/14.1/15	3-4hr	7
Sousse	6.5/8.6/9.2	2hr	9
Tozeur	17/21/22	8½hr	2

*only one is direct, the rest require a change at Bir Bou Regba

GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

Tunis-Carthage International Airport is 8km northeast: a taxi to the centre costs around TD4 to TD7 from 9pm to 5am, or bus 35 heads to/from ave Habib Bourguiba (TD0.6, half-hourly 6.30am to 5.30pm). Note that the TGM L'Aéroport station is not near the airport.

Transtu

The bus, métro and TGM networks come under the umbrella organisation **Transtu** (www.snt-smst.com.tn). For service information check the website.

BUS

Yellow city buses run citywide, but you'll mainly need them to get to the airport. The destination, point of origin and route number are displayed in Arabic by the back door, but routes of interest to tourists have the destination marked in Latin script too. The basic fare is TD0.5 on most routes, and you buy your ticket on board.

There are three main bus terminuses in Tunis: Tunis Marine (Map p68), near the TGM station at the causeway end of ave Habib Bourguiba; place Barcelone (Map pp72-3); and Jardin Thameur (Map pp72-3), off ave Habib Thameur. Tunis Marine is the starting point for bus 35 to the airport, which also has stops on ave Habib Bourguiba.

MÉTRO LÉGER

The *métro léger* is much easier to use than the buses. It's not a metro system as we know it, but a tram network. There are five main routes – see the map, p88. There are route maps in Arabic and French inside the trams.

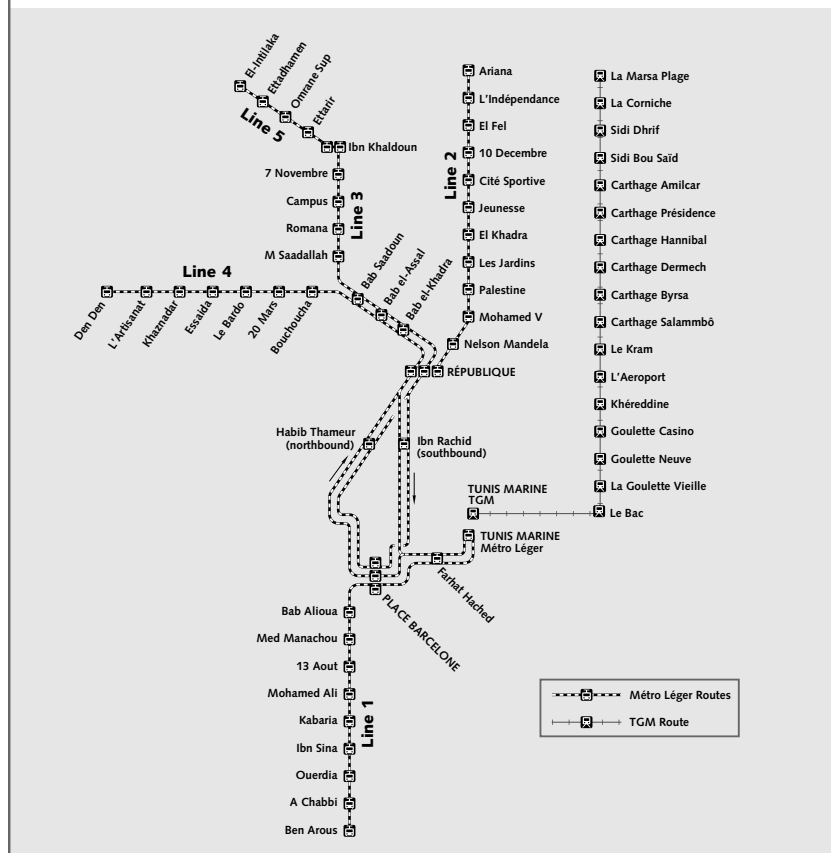
Tickets are sold at the small kiosks at each station entrance. They must be bought before you travel. The basic fare costs TD0.45.

Services using lines 3, 4 and 5 between République and place Barcelone travel south along ave de Paris and ave de Carthage and north on rue de Hollande and ave Habib Thameur.

TGM

The TGM is a suburban train line connecting central Tunis with the beachside

MÉTRO LÉGER & TGM ROUTES



suburbs of La Goulette, Carthage, Sidi Bou Saïd and La Marsa. It's fast, cheap and convenient, though sometimes crowded; avoid the rush hours (7.30am to 8.30am and 5pm to 6.30pm). The first train leaves Tunis Marine at 5am, and the last train at midnight. Departures range from every 12 minutes during peak hours to every 40 minutes. First class is worth the extra cost at busy times, costing TD0.65 to La Goulette (20 minutes) and TD1.1 to Carthage (30 minutes), Sidi Bou Saïd (35 minutes) and La Marsa Plage (45 minutes).

Taxi

Taxis are cheap by European standards and are all fitted with meters. On the day rate, a

short hop costs around TD1; a longer trip such as to the Bardo costs TD4, to Sidi Bou Saïd around TD12. The evening rate is 50% more (9pm to 5am) and there's a TD0.37 surcharge for each piece of luggage. Other than at the airport, where some drivers are intent on negotiating a set fare, drivers usually use the meter. Be warned that the occasional driver fiddles the meter to charge a higher fare (see p70 for more information). Taxis are also sometimes frustratingly all busy, and during peak hours you just have to be patient and lucky. They can be booked by phone – ask at your hotel reception – but the meter begins ticking when the taxi sets out to collect you. For more information call ☎ 1853.

AROUND TUNIS

La Goulette, Carthage, Sidi Bou Saïd, La Marsa and Hammam Lif were once distinct villages and towns, remote from the capital. This changed when the French built the causeway across Lake Tunis in the 19th century, and today they are Tunis suburbs, each retaining a distinct atmosphere.

La Goulette is a clattering seaside escape, where locals flock to its fish restaurants. Carthage is home to rich, important Tunisians, as it has been for millennia – dotted among the luxurious villas are the fascinating remains of the ancient city. Sidi Bou Saïd, further along the coast, is a chic, cliff-top village. More wealthy villas stretch out along the balmy blue-edged beaches at La Marsa and Gammarrh, and Hammam Lif revels in seedy charm, overlooked by a dramatic split-summit mountain.

LA GOULETTE

حلق الواد

The historic port of La Goulette, 10km from the centre, is a local favourite, with hordes flocking to eat at its fish restaurants, cram the beach and revel in the summer breezes. The down-to-earth name means 'the gullet' in French, referring to its position on the narrow channel connecting Lake Tunis to the open sea. It has a rough-and-ready feel, and the beach is grubby, but the restaurants are good and there's a night-time buzz – it's still packed around midnight.

This gullet remains a major port, handling cargo and European passenger ferries. The principal monument is the massive fort – the Ottoman **Borj el-Karrak** (ave Farhet Hached; admission free; ☎ 7.30am–2pm), built over a Spanish ruin. It was used as a prison from the 16th century and slaves were taken from here to be sold in the medina's slave market: Souq el-Berka. They were used to row the corsair galleys.

Today, it's a rambling ruin with not much to see inside. A family inhabit the most imposing parts – arched caverns surrounding an inner courtyard – and they don't appreciate visitors wandering through, though you're welcome to visit the castle's upper storey.

History

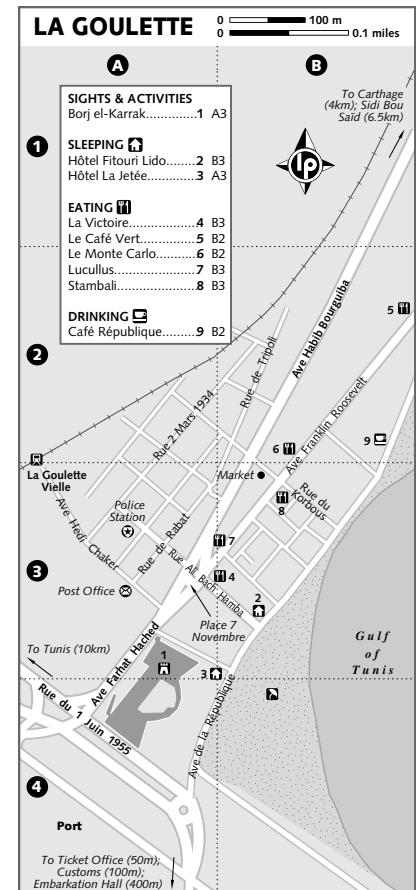
The Arabs developed the port here after their 7th-century conquest, and it became a

strategic defensive outpost – the dimensions of the Ottoman fort show its importance.

In Ottoman times, La Goulette housed one of the state-approved corsair fleets that preyed on Christian shipping in the Mediterranean. West of the kasbah, a small, walled town grew from the profits, housing a substantial Jewish community. In colonial times, many Italians moved in, developing the area known as Little Sicily to the north. Today, both communities have moved on.

Sleeping, Eating & Drinking

If you fancy a room with a sea view, close to central Tunis, there are a few pleasant beachfront hotels here. This is also a great place to eat fish. Most eateries are clustered



around place 7 Novembre and ave Franklin Roosevelt, from cheap-and-cheerful to swish-and-swanky.

Hôtel La Jetée (☎ 71 736 000; ave del la République; s/d TD55/100; 🍷 🍷) This smart, pretty seaside hotel has large, comfortable rooms with balconies. Ask for a room with a sea view.

Hôtel Fitouri Lido (☎ 71 738 333; rue Ali Bach Hamba; s/d TD45/70; 🍷 🍷) Also worthwhile, this hotel has spacious rooms with marble floors and the wrought-iron curly furnishings so beloved of Tunisian midrange hotels. Balconies mostly overlook the busy beach (again, it's worth the few extra dinars for a sea view).

Stambali (☎ 71 738 506; ave Franklin Roosevelt; dishes TD0.5-6) This is a cheap, simple tiles-and-Formica local haunt, where you can tuck into *lablabi* (chickpea soup) and all the other old favourites, and sit indoors or out.

La Victoire (☎ 71 735 398; 1 ave Franklin Roosevelt; mains TD10-16; 🍷 noon-midnight; 🍷 🍷) Upstairs has the atmosphere of a Rotary Club function room – however, it's a good place for watching the action on the street without any traffic fumes, and the fish is tasty. There's also outside seating and a non-air-con downstairs room.

Le Café Vert (☎ 71 736 156; 68 ave Franklin Roosevelt; mains TD5.5-16, 3-course lunch TD12; 🍷 12.30-3pm & 7.30-11.30pm Tue-Sun) One of the best, a recommended place with lots of outdoor seating, this is further up the road – a Tunisian favourite with lots of atmosphere.

Le Monte Carlo (☎ 71 766 729; 4 ave Franklin Roosevelt; mains TD9-16; 🍷 noon-1.30am) With white tablecloths and big pictures of fruit on the walls, this has a nice atmosphere, outside tables and the usual excellent seafood.

Lucillus (☎ 71 737 100; 1 ave Habib Bourguiba; mains TD7-20; 🍷 noon-1am; 🍷 🍷) The most up-market joint around, serving great seafood, this has traditional music and a dancer from around 8pm, on a large terrace protected by greenery and shaded by palms.

Café République (ave de la République; 🍷 9am-4am) This seafront café – offering the usual coffee, mint tea and cold drinks – has tables out on the rocks and the beach.

Getting There & Away

The TGM journey from Tunis Marine to La Goulette Vieille costs TD0.7/0.5 in 1st/2nd

and takes 15 minutes. A taxi to the city centre costs TD4 to TD6.

CARTHAGE

قرطاج

Carthage was a great ancient city, inspiring legends, poetry and envy. Hannibal lived here, the military genius who the Romans were only able to beat by ensuring they never fought him. Virgil wrote his *Aeneid* about the tragic romance between Carthaginian Dido (who founded the city) and Roman Aeneas, and symbolised the battle to the death between the two civilisations.

It was an awesome place. The city walls were 34km long, and houses ran from the top of Byrsa Hill right down to the waterfront. It was famous for its navy: protected within interconnecting harbours, the source of its wealth and dominance. The city's founders, the Phoenicians (from present-day Lebanon), were exceptional businesspeople – the historian Pliny credits them with inventing trade – and a huge Mediterranean power. However, they maintained a distance from their empire. They used mercenaries to fight their battles, and never fought for the hearts of people, unlike the Romans, who absorbed whole communities where they conquered.

The Romans trashed the Carthaginian city, and the Vandals destroyed the Roman replacement – not much of either is left today. However, with a dose of imagination, the fragments that remain evoke Carthage's epic history. On the World Heritage list, the site preserves its natural splendour, with lush vegetation and awesome views.

The highlights are the Punic Quarter on Byrsa Hill, the Punic Ports, the haunting Sanctuary of Tophet and several subsequent Roman structures, including the impressive Antonine Baths, the amphitheatre and Roman villas.

History

According to legend, the Phoenicians founded Carthage in 814 BC. Ruling from Tyre in modern Lebanon, their power was at its peak, and Qart Hadasht (Phoenician for 'new city') was founded to consolidate their North African gains.

It was ideally placed: a narrow, hilly promontory flanked by the sea on three sides – Sebket er-Ariana, the salt lake to

DIDO GOES TRAVELLING

The legend surrounding Carthage's foundation in 814 BC evolved from the efforts of Greek and Roman writers to come up with a suitably aristocratic background for one of the great cities of the ancient Mediterranean world. They based the story on the few facts known to them about Carthage's Phoenician origins, and emphasised the blue-blooded nature of the link. The best-known version features in Virgil's *Aeneid*.

The story begins in the Phoenician capital of Tyre in the time of King Pygmalion. According to Virgil, Pygmalion coveted the wealth of the high priest Sichaesus, who was married to his sister, Princess Elissa. Pygmalion arranged for Sichaesus to be murdered and, concealing his involvement from Elissa, attempted to lay his hands on the loot. The ghost of Sichaesus, however, told Elissa what had happened and advised her to flee – as well as revealing the location of his treasure. Elissa decided to take his advice, and tricked Pygmalion into providing her with ships on the pretext of moving to a new palace down the coast, away from the memory of her husband. Thus she was able to load up all her belongings without raising Pygmalion's suspicions. At the last moment, she was joined by 80 noblemen, including her brother Barca.

They fled first to Cyprus, where they were joined by 80 suitable wives and the island's high priest, before setting sail for North Africa. By now Elissa had become Elissa Didon (aka Queen Dido), meaning 'the wanderer' in Phoenician. On arriving in North Africa, Elissa set about the job of acquiring land on which to found a city. She struck a deal with the locals whereby she could have as much land as could be covered with an ox hide. The wily Elissa cut the hide into thin strips, which she used to surround the hill that became the Byrsa (the name comes from the Greek for 'ox hide'). This part of the legend is possibly a snide Roman dig at the Carthaginians' reputation for sharp business practices. Virgil also added a subsequent doomed romance between Queen Dido and Aeneas of Rome, which drove her to suicide.

the north of Tunis, was connected to the sea at this time. At the centre of a shipping network, it dominated the Mediterranean and trade from the continent.

Tyre came under increasing threat from the Assyrians during the 7th century BC, and Carthage took over as the seat of Phoenician power.

After two ferocious wars with rival Rome, Carthage fell during the third conflict. After a furious fight, 50,000 Carthaginians were taken away to slavery and 1000 remained defiantly besieged. Their commander, Hasdrubal, surrendered, his wife and children committed suicide by immolation, and the site was levelled and symbolically sprinkled with salt.

It was not until over a century later, in 44 BC, that Augustus re-established the city, and it became a provincial capital in 29 BC. Within 200 years, it was the third-largest imperial city behind Rome and Alexandria, with 300,000 residents, three forums, a circus holding 70,000, mammoth baths and an amphitheatre.

After the Roman Empire fell, the Vandals and Byzantines both ruled from Carthage but, following the Arab conquest, Hassan

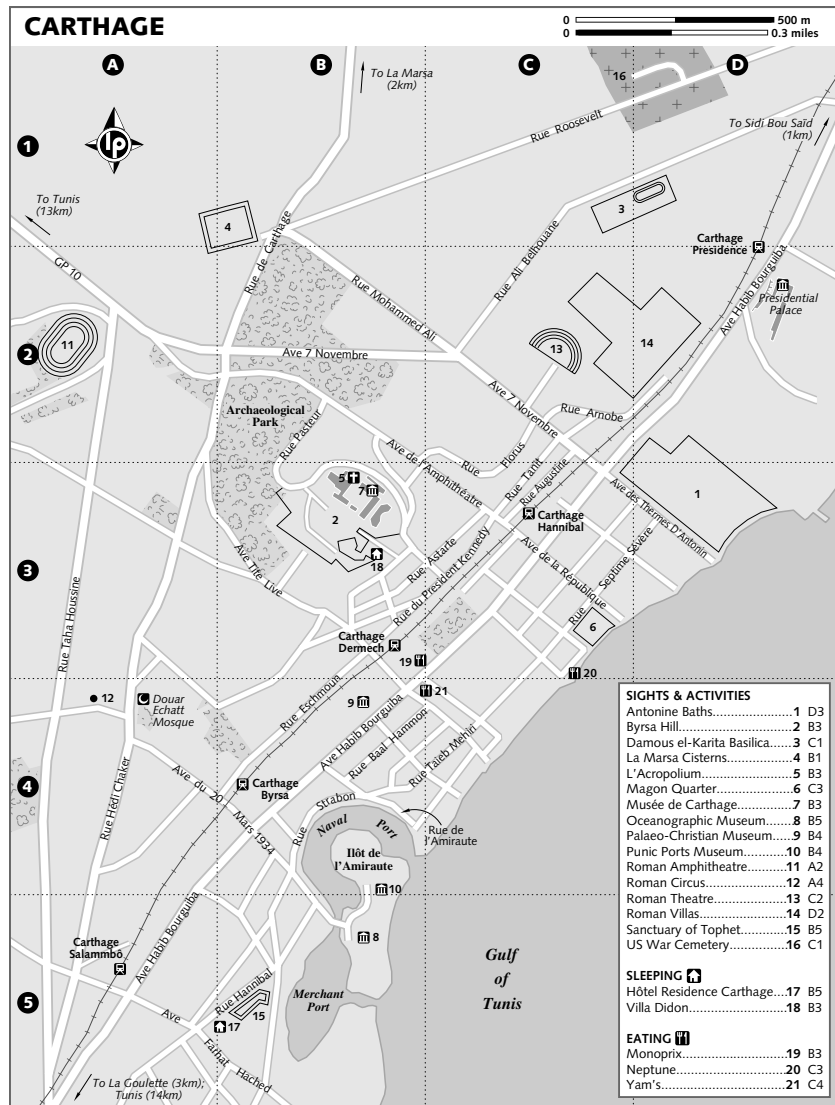
Ibn Nooman ruled from Tunis. Carthage returned to agriculture as its chief activity, and in the 16th century Leo the African reported its production of peaches, pomegranates, olives and figs. In the 19th century the French plundered the ruins for inscriptions to display in the Louvre – the ship carrying them sunk near Toulon.

Today Tunis' most exclusive suburb, filled with sleek villas, Carthage retains its significance – the president's palace is here, in a location chosen for its symbolic as well as its natural advantages.

Sights & Activities

A multiple-entry ticket (ticket TD6, plus camera TD1; 🍷 8.30am-5pm mid-Sep-Mar, 8am-7pm Apr-mid-Sep) valid for one day allows entry to all the widely spread sights listed below – from the Sanctuary of Tophet in the south to the Antonine Baths in the north it's 2km. You can use the TGM to cover larger distances. If you only have a few hours, visit the museum and the surrounding Punic ruins, then walk downhill to the Antonine Baths.

Otherwise an all-inclusive route is to start at the Sanctuary of Tophet, walk to the Punic Ports, then take the TGM one



stop from Carthage Byrsa to Dermech to get to the Palaeo-Christian museum. Next, walk up Byrsa Hill for the museum and Punic quarter. Then take a taxi to the further-flung sights: the Roman circus and amphitheatre, the Malga Cistern and Damous el-Karita basilica, getting the driver to drop you at the Roman Theatre, from

where you can walk to the Roman villas, Magon quarter and Antonine Baths. To cover all this you will need near super-human stamina; you're advised to be selective or make several visits.

Also located at Carthage are L'Acropolium (Cathedral of St Louis), the Oceanographic Museum and the US War Cemetery.

BYRSA HILL

Getting off the TGM at Carthage Hannibal or Carthage Dermech, it's a short, steep walk to the top of Byrsa Hill. The entire site is visible from the summit, with amazing views through cypress trees to the ancient Punic ports and the intense blue of the Tunis Gulf.

The hill was the ancient city's spiritual heart. In Punic times, it was occupied by a temple to the Carthaginian god Eshmoun. The Romans destroyed most of the Punic structures and levelled off the top, to create a massive space – 336m by 323m – to hold their capitol and forum. Here stood temples, a library, a 30m-high judicial basilica and several piazzas. All this was in turn destroyed as the fall of Rome unleashed a free-for-all for building materials, but the foundations were left, which have allowed archaeologists to work out the layout and scale of the buildings, delineated on small podiums outside the museum.

Most exciting, just below the summit, is a small, well-preserved section of a Punic residential quarter that was buried and filled with earth – and thus preserved – during Roman levelling operations. This dates from the time of Hannibal (around the 3rd century BC) and is a marvellously evocative place to wander. The neat remains show a street grid with small, careful, domestic structures, some of which were once five storeys high, complete with subterranean cisterns and ground-floor shops.

Musée de Carthage

Housed in the former French cathedral seminary, here the ground floor features some fine 5th-century AD mosaics with lots of peachy bottoms; a Roman sculpture of a boozy Silenus and Maenad continues the sensual theme. There are lamps dating from the 4th century BC to the 7th century AD, some still blackened by smoke. Particularly striking among the Punic remains are the domestic objects – masks painted on fragile ostrich shells, some beautiful engraved 3rd-century razors with duck-shaped handles, and a 4th-century BC terracotta baby bottle in the shape of a bird. There's also a fragment of a Punic town-planning inscription. But the highlight are two magnificent 4th-century BC stone-carved sarcophagi, showing a reclining man and woman –

naturalistic representations that seem less ancient than they are, and echo Egyptian and Etruscan influences.

Upstairs, the displays are divided into different themes, one of which describes the final siege of Punic Carthage (149–146 BC) and shows the Punic terracotta bullets and the Roman lead ones. With a few centuries' worth of hindsight, the Roman versions look more lethal. There is some beautifully worked jewellery from a Punic tomb, and many more fragments from daily life and work more than 2000 years ago, such as amphorae and fishing bits and bobs.

L'Acropolium

The 1884 French-built **L'Acropolium** (Cathedral of St Louis; admission TD2.5; ☎ 9am–6pm) is a Gothic extravaganza, an assertion of colonial power symbolically plonked in this historic location. It was dedicated to the 13th-century French saint-king Louis who died on the beach at Carthage in 1270 during the ill-fated Eighth Crusade (he was hoping to convert the Hafsid ruler; instead his troops wilted in the heat). The deconsecrated cathedral's ice-cream interior has been restored and houses frequent, interesting exhibitions and concerts (hence the name change).

ROMAN AMPHITHEATRE, LA MARSA CISTERNS & ROMAN CIRCUS

These minor sights are on the hill's western side. The Roman amphitheatre is about a 15-minute walk down from the museum. Once one of the largest in the Roman Empire, with a capacity for 36,000, today only the neat overgrown oval of the stage remains. It's an evocative place, with a sinister exposed subterranean passage where once the theatre's victims cowered. Contrary to legend, St Perpetua and St Felicity were not martyred here, but probably at a military camp outside Carthage.

Across the road is a huge 2nd-century pipe network – remains of the voluminous cisterns that housed Roman Carthage's water supply. The reservoir was nearly 1km long, fed by a huge aqueduct carrying mountain spring water from Zaghouan.

The circus, used for chariot racing, is around 1km south, and once seated 70,000, but only the barest outline can be discerned today. It was later a cemetery.

US WAR CEMETERY

Around 750m along the road from the cisterns, a neat forest of white crosses bears testament to the Americans killed here during WWII. There are 2840 graves at the **cemetary** (rue Roosevelt), and a Wall of Remembrance to 3724 others never found. Like all war cemeteries, its dignified simplicity quietly underlines the horror of so many lives lost.

DAMOUS EL-KARITA BASILICA

This once monumental church is around 1km from the cemetery though it's along a not-very-scenic stretch of road. The basilica was 65m by 45m, with nine aisles, and the remaining lines of broken grey columns clearly stake out this huge scale, if not much else. Steps lead into a well-preserved underground rotunda, 9.5m in diameter, the basement of a building that was possibly a baptistery or a saint's tomb.

ROMAN THEATRE & VILLAS

The Roman theatre has been largely reconstructed, forming an impressive, if not Roman, venue for the annual Carthage International Festival (see opposite). The tiered seating is original; it's thought it could accommodate 5000 spectators. Excavations show that it was lavishly decorated, with lots of marble flourishes. Churchill once gave a speech to the British Army here.

Just east are the **Roman villas** (rue Arnobe), a chance to see a Roman quarter of the city, with Villa of the Aviary as its centrepiece. You get a real sense of refined Roman life from the much-reconstructed houses – with sumptuous marble, mosaics and views.

ANTONINE BATHS

The Romans chose a sublime seaside setting for this fabulous bath complex, a short walk across the road from the Roman villas. Begun under Hadrian and finished in the 2nd century, it was the largest outside Rome, supplied with water by the great Zaghuan aqueduct. Just the foundations remain, but their size is awesome. A plan and model of the baths above the main complex help you read the buildings.

A circular *caldarium* (hot room) was flanked by smaller saunas, and led onto a small *tepidarium* (warm room), which allowed access to the huge 22m by 42m

frigidarium (cold room) at the centre, which had eight colossal pillars. Beyond this was a wonderful, 17.5m by 13.5m, seaside swimming pool, no trace of which remains. Either side of the *frigidarium* were *palestras* and gymnasiums, where people could indulge in naked wrestling and other such frisky sports.

A sole 15m-high *frigidarium* column gives a sense of the sometime height, its capital alone weighing 8 tons, and huge fragments of marble inscription supply a taste of the décor. To the southwest a huge semicircular construction was discovered, with around 80 seats, which archaeologists at first thought a theatre. It turned out to be a large group of communal latrines.

The baths were destroyed by the Vandals doing what they did best in AD 439, and the stone reused by the Arabs during the construction of Tunis.

The shady palm-filled garden contains other remains too, including a tiny early Christian funerary chapel, a cool underground refuge, with some beautiful naïve terracotta tiles showing Biblical scenes. It was moved here from the northern part of Carthage and rebuilt.

MAGON QUARTER

The **Magon Quarter** (rue Septime Sévère) is a few blocks south of the Antonine Baths. Excavations have uncovered a small area of Roman workshops superimposed on a 5th-century BC Punic residential artisans' quarter. It's now surrounded by a garden. Like the Byrsa quarter, the layout is ordered, and the small houses are endowed with cisterns. There's little to see, but it's a pretty seafront promenade.

PALAEO-CHRISTIAN MUSEUM

Near Carthage Dermech TGM station, this small **museum** (☎ 8.30am–5pm mid-Sep–Mar, 8am–7pm Apr–mid-Sep) has good displays on the Punic ports and excavation methods. First-century AD buckles, forceps and needles are among its relics. There's a fine 5th-century marble of Ganymede and the Eagle.

The museum grounds include ruins of the city's most important Byzantine church, the 6th-century Basilica of Carthage. It was huge: 36.35m by 25.5m, with a 14-sq-metre basilica, three naves and western and eastern apses.

PUNIC PORTS

Close to Carthage Byrsa TGM station, it's easy to discern the shape of these two ancient ports, the legendary, coveted basis of Carthage's power and prosperity. The southern, oblong commercial port linked to the northern circular military port by a narrow channel. This arrangement made the naval base secure as only the commercial port had sea access. It was arranged so that the military port was hidden from outside, but the Carthaginian navy could see out to sea. The military base had moorings for an incredible 220 vessels in dry docks and around the quay-lined edge. The 7-hectare commercial port was bordered by quays and warehouses.

The ports were filled in by Scipio after the destruction of Carthage in 146 BC, but in the 2nd century the Romans reinvented the islet as a circular forum, with two temples, and used the port to house their fleet for shipping wheat to Rome. Rises in sea level meant the quay walls had to be raised several times. By the end of the 6th century, the harbour had fallen into disuse.

Today the Îlot de l'Amiraute, at the centre of the naval basin, has a minuscule museum, the **Punic Ports Museum** (☎ 8.30am–5pm mid-Sep–Mar, 8am–7pm Apr–mid-Sep), housing interesting reconstructions of the Punic dockyards and the equally impressive Roman port complex.

Nearby, the **Oceanographic Museum** (Dar el-Hout; ☎ 71 730 420; 28 rue 2 Mars; admission TD1; ☎ 10am–1pm & 3–6pm Tue–Sat, 10am–6pm Sun) contains enthusiastic displays of model boats, conservation methods and stuffed, pickled and live wildlife, from giant whale skeletons to preserved vultures. Downstairs is an aquarium with some disconsolate fish.

SANCTUARY OF TOPHET

The chilling **Sanctuary of Tophet** (rue Hannibal), just east of Carthage Salammbô TGM station, was first excavated in 1921. French archaeologists uncovered a sacrificial site and burial ground, where it's believed Carthaginian children were sacrificed to the deities Baal Hammon and Tanit – a stele now in the Bardo Museum shows a priest carrying a child, perhaps to sacrifice. It's an extraordinary, haunting place, with a mass of stubby stelae engraved with simple geometric shapes and symbols under shady trees. Some later Roman foundations shelter more stelae, a

particularly spooky spot. The name Tophet is Hebrew for 'place of burning' and comes from Bible references to child sacrifice, such as in Jeremiah: '[people of Judah] have built the altar called Tophet... and there they burn to death their little sons and daughters'.

More than 20,000 urns have been discovered here, each containing the ashes of a child (mostly newborn, but also older children up to the age of four) and marked with a stela. Many also contained the burned bones of lambs or goat kids. The majority have been dated to the period between the 4th and 2nd centuries BC when Carthage was embroiled in numerous wars and rebellions, and the need to appease the gods was at its greatest. However, there is some controversy about interpretations of the site – see below.

The Romans later built workshops, warehouses and a temple over the site.

GOLF

Carthage Golf Course (☎ 71 863 619; www.golf.carthage.com) Created in 1927, this is the oldest in the country, with 18 challenging holes set among eucalyptus, cypress and pine trees and running alongside citrus orchards.

Festivals & Events

Carthage International Festival (www.festival-carthage.com.tn) takes place in July and August, with internationally renowned music, dance and theatre in the spectacular open-air setting of the Roman theatre.

SACRIFICING THE TRUTH?

Ancient Greek and Roman spin doctors had a hand in propagating stories of Carthaginian child sacrifice. Plutarch and Diodorus claimed this was common at Carthage and the remains at the Sanctuary of Tophet seem to support this view. However, some claim that the children offered to the gods were stillborn or had died of natural causes. Punic people were continually painted as tainted – it was claimed that they also traded and stole children. If a Roman said that you had *fides punica*, he meant you were mighty unreliable. Carthaginian child sacrifice certainly formed a telling contrast with the more noble classical Western civilisations (some of whom merely threw people to wild beasts).

The biennial **Carthage International Film Festival**, held in Tunis' major cinemas, concentrates on Middle Eastern and African cinema. The two-week festival is next due in Autumn 2008 – it's in Burkina Faso on alternate (odd-numbered) years.

Sleeping & Eating

Hôtel Residence Carthage (☎ 71 730 786; 16 rue Hanibal; s/d with breakfast TD57/114; ♿) About 100m from the Tophet, this is a classic small hotel, with sunny rooms decked in old-fashioned furnishings, overlooking gardens. Its three-fork Moroccan restaurant, Le Punique, is pretty smart, with an inviting conservatory.

Villa Didon (www.villadidon.com; Byrsa Hill; ste TD350) A 10-room designer hotel, with furnishings by Starck and Arad and some wonderful North African contemporary art, this is superbly sited on top of Byrsa Hill. Rooms are huge and modernist, with open-plan bathrooms (the Jacuzzi stands on a platform opposite the bed). Large windows and private balconies have stunning views. There's a spa, chic bar (well worth a stop) and Le Restó restaurant, with adventurous international cuisine and the same amazing panoramas.

Monoprix (ave Habib Bourguiba; ☎ 8.30am-10pm) There's a branch next to Carthage Dermech TGM station, if you're self-catering.

Neptune (☎ 71 731 456; mains TD6-14) Seating at this restaurant is on a smashing small seaside terrace, a calm and breezy spot to sit on a hot day or evening. It serves upmarket fish and seafood dishes.

Yam's (☎ 71 720 047; 52 ave Habib Bourguiba; snacks around TD3; ☎ 7am-midnight; ♿) Just below Carthage Dermech TGM station, Yam's is a spic-and-span *salon de thé* with shady wicker roadside seating. It offers milkshakes, fruit juices and palatable pancakes – a good pitstop between sights.

Getting There & Away

The journey from Tunis Marine to any of the six Carthage TGM stations costs TD1.1/0.65 in 1st/2nd class, and takes about 30 minutes.

SIDI BOU SAÏD

سيدي بو سعيد

With cascading bougainvillea and flaming-red geraniums against gleaming white-wash, bright-blue window grills, narrow, steep cobbled streets, and jaw-dropping

glimpses of azure coast, the cliff-top village of Sidi Bou Saïd has to be one of the prettiest spots in Tunisia. It's also everyone's favourite tourist trap, but wears this remarkably well, remaining untacky and genuinely chic without being exclusive.

It clusters around the Mosque and Zaouia of Sidi Bou Saïd, a 13th-century Sufi saint. The distinctive architecture is Andalusian-inspired, a result of the influx of Spanish Muslims in the 16th century. Longstanding local families and expats have ensured that the buildings retained their character; the village was given protected status in 1915. Previous visitors include Paul Klee, Auguste Macke, André Gide, Michel Foucault, and Osbert and Edith Sitwell.

The centre of activity is small, cobbled place Sidi Bou Saïd, lined with cafés, sweet stalls and souvenir shops. At the bottom of the cliff lies a busy beach and a yacht-bobbing marina.

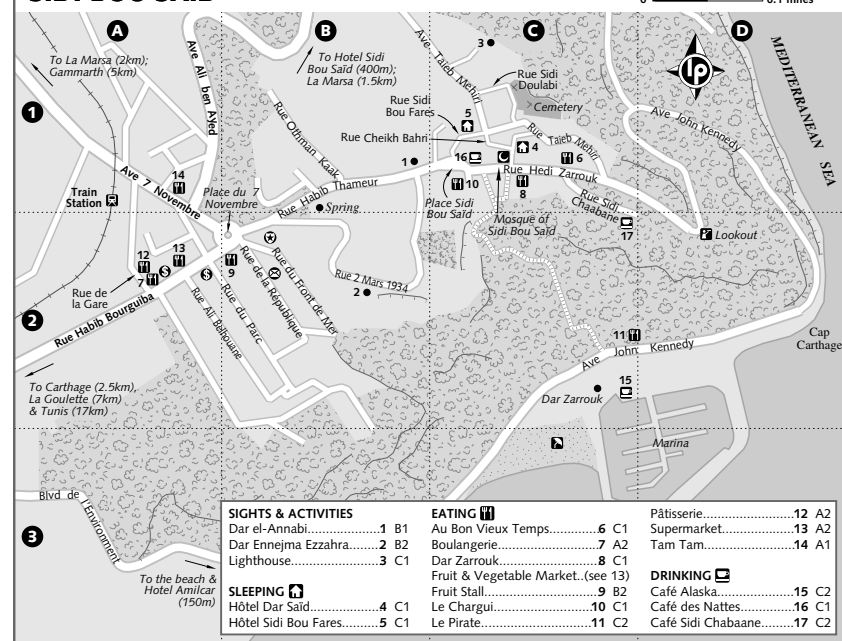
Sights & Activities

The **lighthouse** above the village stands on the site of an ancient *ribat* (fort), built in the early 9th century as part of a coastal early-warning system that included the *ribats* of Sousse (p189) and Monastir (p197).

Dar el-Annabi (rue Habib Thameur; admission TD3; ☎ 9am-6.30pm) is an 18th-century family home. It's vibrantly tiled and centred around several courtyards filled with jasmine, henna and bougainvillea. Rooms on display include a prayer room, reception rooms and a lovely little library, all carefully presented, with grand wax figures and black-and-white family photos adding a sense of authenticity. The superb panorama from the top terrace sweeps across the village, bay and Carthage.

Dar Ennejma Ezzahra (Centre of Arabic & Mediterranean Music; ☎ 71 740 102; admission adult/child TD3/1.5 ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-5pm Tue-Sun) was built between 1912 and 1922 by the extraordinary patron of the arts, French-American Baron Rodolphe d'Erlanger and his Italian-American wife. It's a wonderful extravaganza of Arabian–Art Deco, a pocket of time filled with virtuoso carving, his impressive amateur paintings and amazing collection of gramophones and musical instruments. The Baron was largely responsible for the revival of Tunisian traditional music and wrote a treatise on its history. He tragically

SIDI BOU SAÏD



lost his son in WWII and died of TB when in his 60s. The mansion occasionally hosts much-recommended performances of rare classical music (ring for details).

The street heading off to the right at the top end of the main square takes you to the top of a steep stepped path leading down through pine forest to the marina and a small beach. The walk from Sidi Bou Saïd takes about 40 minutes.

Hôtel Dar Saïd (right), has a sleek sea-going yacht, **Dar Zarrouk** (☎ 71 729 666; rue Larbi Zarrouk; 4½hrs/day/weekend/week TD400/700/1200/3000 May-Oct, TD300/500/800/2000 Nov-Apr) with a two-person crew for rent. It takes up to eight people, including the crew.

Festivals & Events

Sidi Bou Saïd has a festival called **Kharja**, held in July or August in honour of the Muslim saint who lived here, when Sufi brotherhoods have a procession up to his shrine.

Sleeping

Despite lacking a certain imagination when it comes to names, there are some

exceedingly lovely hotels here and it makes a tranquil base.

Hôtel Amilcar (☎ 71 740 788; www.hotel-amilcar.com; s/d low season TD22/44, high season TD34/68; ♿) A 1970s monster lurks at the foot of Sidi Bou Saïd's picturesque cliff. This has big plain rooms with sea views and a good location, and is something of a bargain if you overlook the ugly architecture and occasional blaring music by the pool.

Hôtel Sidi Bou Fares (☎ 71 740 091; 15 rue Sidi Bou Fares; s/d TD28/68) Simple, barrel-vaulted rooms with prettily tiled walls surround a courtyard full of blooming shrubs, vines, a shady fig tree and scattered chairs and tables. The friendly staff speak excellent English.

Hôtel Sidi Bou Saïd (☎ 71 740 411; s/d TD90/120) About 1km north of Sidi Bou Saïd off the road to La Marsa, this modern place is set high up and has sweeping views across the bay and luxurious rooms.

Hôtel Dar Saïd (☎ 71 729 666; www.darsaid.com.tn; rue Toumi; r from TD245, with view TD315; ♿) This boutique hotel is one of the country's most charming. It feels secluded but is in the centre of old Sidi Bou Saïd, housed in a

converted, grand (but not imposing) villa. It's centred around pretty, tiled courtyards and has views filled with piercing-blue sea and pink bougainvilleas. The pool is small but pretty and overlooks the bay, and there's a lovely garden terrace.

Eating

RESTAURANTS

Le Chargui (☎ 71 740 987; rue Hedi Zarrouk; mains TD5-12; ☎ noon-midnight Apr-Oct, noon-8pm Nov-Mar) The cheapest central option, in a big open-air courtyard with whitewashed concrete booths around low tables. It's draped in blue and has white rugs, neon lighting and a rooftop terrace with great views. Food is simple and good, with spicy *salade mechouia*, fresh fish and tasty *merguez* sausages.

Tam Tam (☎ 71 728 535; ave 7 Novembre; mains TD5.5-18; ☎ noon-midnight Tue-Sun Sep-Jun; ☎) Near the station, this is where Sidi Bou Saïd is at, with a buzzing mix of dressed-up locals, TV screens and modern-diner design. There are a few outside tables. Food is a well-executed mix of Italian, Eastern and American dishes. Try the scrummy *petites brochettes de poulet* (chicken kebabs) and fruit cocktails.

Au Bon Vieux Temps (☎ 71 744 733; 56 rue Hedi Zarrouk; mains TD17-24; ☎ noon-midnight; ☎) This small, gorgeous choice has a ridiculously romantic terrace centred on a trickling fountain. Drink in the amazing sea views while tucking into excellent French and Tunisian food. This place has filled many illustrious bellies, from Madame Chirac's to the princess of Thailand's.

Dar Zarrouk (☎ 71 740 591; rue Toumi; mains TD18-28; ☎ 12.30-2.30pm & 7.30-10.30pm Tue-Sun; ☎) Linked to Hôtel Dar Saïd (see p97), this restaurant scores masses on atmosphere, its long wide terrace with white sun-shaded tables overlooking the deep-blue bay. However, food is good but not brilliant and, despite many waiters, service can get a bit muddled.

Le Pirate (☎ 71 748 266; ave John Kennedy; mains TD19.5-28; ☎ noon-3pm & 8-11pm; ☎) By the marina, this is another upmarket, creamily decorated place, with candlelit garden seating under palm trees and white canopies, serving seafood with a French slant.

QUICK EATS

A popular stall around the corner from Café des Nattes sells *bombalouni* (dough-

nuts) and almond *brîqs* (deep-fried flaky pastry envelopes).

For self-caterers, there's a **supermarket** (ave Habib Bourguiba; ☎ 8.30am-8pm Mon-Sat, 8.30am-1pm Sun), beneath which is a fruit and veg market. Down some stairs west of the supermarket are an excellent boulangerie and **pâtisserie** (rue de la Gare). Try a fresh fruit milkshake from the **fruit stall** (place du 7 Novembre).

Drinking

Café de Nattes (place Sidi Bou Saïd; ☎ 7am-midnight) This is the village epicentre. Fronted by steep steps, the trad-café interior has stick-of-rock columns and rush-mat seating, and outside are small terraces ideal for checking out the cobbled catwalk of the street while sipping mint tea with pinenuts. At the bottom of the steps is a cheaper popular café.

Café Sidi Chabaane (rue Sidi Chabaane; ☎ 7am-midnight Apr-Sep, to 8pm Oct-Mar) One of the prettiest café settings around, with layers of terraces cut into the cliff. This is an ideal place to watch the sunset, with high-up views over the blue-green sea, yacht-stuffed marina and sandy swathe of beach. The fresh fruit juices are very good.

Café Alaska (Marina; ☎ 8am-1am Apr-Sep, to 7pm Oct-Mar) This large marina-edged tree-shaded café is a busy local option in the evening, with great sandwiches.

Getting There & Away

Sidi Bou Saïd is about 17km northeast of Tunis. The easiest way to travel is by TGM train from Tunis Marine (1st/2nd class TD1.1/0.7, 35 minutes). It's a 15-minute, steepish walk from the station to the top of the hill and the centre of the old part of the village. A daytime taxi costs around TD12.

LA MARSÀ

La Marsa, once the Ottoman beys' summer base, is an exclusive beachside suburb at the end of the TGM line, with grand, dazzling-white villas. The palm-lined beach stretches north around a bay that finishes beneath the cliffs of the five-star resort village of Gammarth. It's relatively uncrowded on weekdays, but everyone in Tunis seems to descend at weekends. There's a restored 16th-century palace, **Al-Abdallya**, signposted from beside Tunisie Telecom on ave Habib Bourguiba, which the caretaker will be delighted to show you, though if there's no temporary

المرسی

exhibition, there's little to see other than newly whitewashed arched interiors.

There's a **Publinet Le Net Club** (rue Cheikh Zarrouk 4; per hr TD2; ☎ 9am-midnight Mon-Sat, 10am-midnight Sun), a block away from Pension Predl.

Off ave Habib Bourguiba, **Pension Predl** (☎ 71 950 378; 26 rue Mohamed Salah Malki; s/d with shared bathroom TD20/40) is unusual in that it's a pension in a Tunisian home. It's basic but has clean, high-ceilinged rooms. A timeless living room filled with homey clutter is centred around a linoleum-covered table and several sofas.

A few minutes walk from the TGM station, American-owned and highly kitsch **Hôtel Plaza Corniche** (☎ 71 743 489; rue du Maroc; s/d TD80/110; ☎ ☎), with plastic palms and bright flower-sprigged rooms with balconies, is a popular place for a poolside evening drink. There's also a lively disco – reputedly one of Tunis' best.

The refined French **Au Bon Vieux Temps** (☎ 71 774 733; rue Hedi Zarrouk; mains TD14-20; ☎ noon-3pm & 6pm-midnight Mon-Sat; ☎), just by the TGM station, is intimate inside and has a small tree-shaded terrace.

Café Le Saf Saf (place Saf Saf; snacks TD1-6; ☎ 7am-midnight) is a lovely traditional café, with good snacks as well as tea and coffee. It has a tiled courtyard with shady trees centred around a wooden wheel that was once turned by a camel.

GAMMARTH

Beneath the cliffs of Cap Gammarth, 2km north of La Marsa and really just an extension of it, is this rich, leafy suburb with lots of sleek seaside villas, a curve of coast, some excellent restaurants and a gamut of five-star hotels.

The hugely glamorous, if a bit soulless, five-star **La Residence** (☎ 71 910 101; www.theresidence-tunis.com; Les Côtes de Carthage; s/d from €298/312) is famous for its fabulous spa – all domes, arches and columns in marble, with around 30 treatment rooms where you can do everything from lymphatic drainage to seaweed

wraps. If you can't afford to stay, you can use the facilities if you book a treatment.

With a great seafront location, **Les Ombrelles** (☎ 71 742 964; ave Taieb M'hiri; mains TD10-20; ☎) has tasty, straightforward seafood. The interior dining room is a warm yellow and the whole place is candlelit at night, with lovely outdoor seating. It's slightly arrogant, though, and service can be unfriendly.

A graceful white-painted villa, **Les Dunes** (☎ 23 401 000; 130 ave Taieb M'hiri; mains TD12-24; ☎ noon-3pm Tue-Sun, 8pm-midnight daily; ☎) has a terrace overlooking the sea (though it's across a road) and serves Italian food, specialising – of course – in seafood. The piped music is a bit cheesy.

There are truly big-blue views from **Le Grand Bleu** (☎ 71 913 700; ave Taieb M'hiri; mains TD17-22; ☎ 12.30-3pm & 8-11.30pm, bar 11am-2am; ☎), perched high above the bay, a gilded, expense-account haunt with excellent seafood. It's a place to impress, with a large terrace, white-tableclothed tables set wide apart and shoals of waiters. There's also a popular piano bar.

You can walk around the bay from La Marsa, which takes about 45 minutes. A cab from La Marsa will cost around TD1.

HAMMAM LIF

This dilapidated southern suburb has been a spa resort for thousands of years. In colloquial Arabic, Lif means 'nose', as the baths here were reputedly good for clearing the sinuses. Bou Kornine – with its twin peaks (the name means two humps) – looms above the district. This is the shadowy mountain you can see from across the bay in Carthage and Sidi Bou Saïd.

Hammam Lif is a popular place to promenade along the seafront, survey your fellow citizens and search out a breeze (or even leap in the sea) on summer evenings, with interesting buildings and loads of food stalls. The corniche is busy until at least 1am. You can reach here by frequent trains from Tunis Ville (20 to 30 minutes) or by taxi (TD4).

© Lonely Planet Publications. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above – 'Do the right thing with our content.'