

TUNISIAN TOURISM REJOICES OVER FIRST CRUISE CALL



For the first time since the attack at the Bardo Museum on 18 March, 2015, which resulted in 21 dead people, mostly tourists, a cruise ship made a stopover in Tunisia. This brings hope to Tunisian tourism which has been hit hard thanks to the security concerns of many visitors.

L'Europa, a German cruise ship, stopped on 6 October in Port La Goulette in Tunis. After more than a year, this is the first vessel that Tunisian authorities have welcomed in their country.

Out of the 312 German tourists that were aboard the ship, 142 debarked to discover the tourist attractions of the city, including the archaeological site of Carthage, the Medina, and the village of Sidi Bou Saïd. Before the Arab Spring started in 2010, the local cruise tourism was flourishing. Every year, 900,000 cruisers came to explore the Tunisian coast.

The commander of the Port La Goulette, Mohamed Sekhiri, believes that there is a need to envision a future more auspiciously. "Hapag-Lloyd (the company that owns the cruise ship) is not among our traditional clientele, and this is good news. We convinced them that the country is safe. This provides a positive sign to other companies," he said.

With the still fresh memories of the attack on the museum as well as three other bombings last year, the port authorities, the Tunisian tourism minister and the interior minister focused on the security of the visitors. **Discreet escorts were assigned to ensure the safety of cruise passengers when traveling to different places.**

The cruise call is regarded by many as a return to normalcy for Tunisian tourism. According to the Ministry of Tourism, the next stops will take place next January. If the security situation continues to improve in Tunis, the authorities and businessmen expect the return of regular cruises in about a year.

As for now, the statistical curve of the number of tourists visiting Tunisia is decreasing. From 2.32 million in the first half of 2015, the statistics fell to 1.82 million during the first months of 2016.

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