

TUNISIA'S TOURISM REJOICES OVER INCREASED ARRIVALS



Tunisia's tourism businesses recorded increased amount of visitors. Experts view it as a sign of a recovery coming a year after the terrorist attack in Sousse which led to the death of 38 foreign tourists, mainly British.

The latest figures by Sojern, an independent company specialized in travel research, indicate that Tunisia's tourism numbers increased by 10% in July.

This news however comes in a context marked by the extension of the state of emergency in the country and the continuation of the travel warning released by the British Foreign Office.

For many months, following the decision of the tour operators to suspend their activities at the airports of Monastir and Enfidha, **only the national airline Tunis Air provides connections between London and Tunis.**

The data from Sojern show that, because of the terrorist attacks of last year, there has been an overall decline in global intentions to travel to destinations such as Tunisia (drop down 9%), Egypt (less than 15%) and Turkey (less than 14%).

However, despite this general downward trend in world travel, tourists from the United Kingdom seem to have decided in July to explore Tunisia.

In light of this "indiscipline" of the British tourists, Sojern's report warns the European travel industry: "Marketers should take into account this disobedience of tourists and changes in the market trends of Middle East. The fact is that it is undeniable that the United Kingdom nationals retain a strong interest in journeys in this part of the world. Certainly, political instability and insecurity in this region can influence the travelling intentions of the British citizens, but doesn't exaggerate the impact," concluded the study by Sojern.

Tunisia's tourism is however still struggling. The revenues were down 44.6% from January to May 2016 in comparison to the same period of 2015, totaling USD 256.2 million, according to the Ministry of Tourism. The non-resident visitors in the country amounted to 1.19 million from January to May, a decrease of 24.2% over the same period of last year.

According to Housseem Ben Azouz, president of the Inter-Professional Federation of Tourism (FIT), **the European markets remain down with the exception of Eastern Europe, especially Ukraine and Russia.**

The Russian market grew 649% from January to May to the same period last year, contributing 74,415 tourists. Russia is in second place among European markets, following France, which sent 115,752 tourists to Tunisia as the top source, a decline of 36.4% in the same comparison. The Russian market is estimated to generate between 500,000 to 1 million tourists per year, said FIT's president. Around USD 2.2 million were invested in marketing campaigns of Tunisia's tourism in Russia.

“For this season, the solution lies in the domestic market and in the neighboring Algeria (415,253 visitors from January to May). The important thing is to begin now to prepare ourselves for 2017, to secure the revival of tourism in Tunisia,” said Ben Azouz.

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