

TUNISIAN TOURISM HIT BY THE RUSSIAN INFLUX



Tunisian tourism authorities reported declining numbers of international visitors. From January to September 2016, the country's tourist revenues declined by more than 8% compared to the same period in 2015, and by 34% compared with 2014, announced the Tunisian Ministry of Tourism.

The revenues amounted to 730 million euros, compared to 800 million euros in the first nine months of 2015. **The number of overnight stays has increased slightly (14.84 million in 2016 compared to 14.01 million in 2015).**

Tunisian tourism had a small turnaround with the stopover of a cruise ship in October in La Goulette, the first in over a year. Meanwhile, the world's number one travel company, the German tour operator Tui, announced on November 2, 2016 that it chartered Tunisair planes for weekly flights between Frankfurt, Düsseldorf, and Djerba. Tui will increase its accommodation capacity in Tunisia starting from the spring of 2017 with the opening of two hotels, in addition to the three facilities that it already owns.

Since the 2011 revolution, and especially the wave of terrorist attacks in 2015, the decline of the tourist industry alone cost Tunisia 3 points of GDP. Tourism declined by 35.1% in 2015, by 66% in six years. After the last year attack in Tunis and then in Sousse, around a million people cancelled their tours in the country. Moreover, some 70 hotels had to close.

Today, however, Tunisian tourism stakeholders and local companies are trying to cope with the influx of Russian visitors - by the end of October there were 600,000 Russian visitors recorded, which is a tenfold growth over 2015. The country focused mostly on non-Arab visitors like the French, Brits and Spaniards who came to spend their holiday in huge numbers. Thanks to the travel warnings following the attacks however, Tunisian tourism authorities needed to look elsewhere.

The sector benefited greatly from the Moscow's travel restrictions for Egypt and Turkey, which had been the two most popular destinations for Russian travelers. Now, they had to find some alternative - Tunisia. Visa-free travel and low prices are the biggest draw for the Russian holidaymakers. Local companies expect continuing growth of their numbers.

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