

HISTORICAL SITES IN MOROCCO GOT IN FOCUS OF THE TOURISM AUTHORITIES



The new strategy of Moroccan authorities tends to let domestic and foreign tourists discover the magnificent cultural and historical sites located in several cities of the Kingdom. For many, cultural tourism could serve as a new locomotive for national tourism.

During these difficult times marked by a devastating pandemic, national tourism has been plunged for more than a year in a deep economic crisis which risks reducing considerably its role in the national economy.

Once considered the second-largest source of foreign currency for the Kingdom, it is now relegated to the status of a simple economic sector that must turn to domestic tourists to compensate for the loss of foreign tourists. However, Moroccans have always been left out of commercial offers made by tourism operators.

A situation that is fundamentally grotesque given that the Kingdom is not only endowed with considerable natural assets but also abounds in fascinating historical and cultural monuments to be discovered by our fellow citizens. The new strategy of the public authorities is to encourage Moroccans to travel around and discover their own country through historical sites.

If everyone could know its seaside potential, generously fed by two beautiful maritime facades (Atlantic and Mediterranean), an omnipresent sun throughout the year and a continental climate that is pleasant to live in, many are unaware of its numerous cultural assets represented by historical sites of legendary beauty, bequeathed in several cities by the ancient dynastic civilizations that have marked the rich and breathtaking history of the country. The latest event in Tangier, involving the rehabilitation of the arena, shows how cultural tourism could serve as a new locomotive and even a formidable springboard for national tourism. The Tangier bullring, historically called Plaza Toro, is indeed about to be completely rehabilitated on an initiative taken by the city authorities, who see in this project a step towards boosting cultural tourism.

The project to upgrade the Plaza Toro, which builds on the plural heritage capital of the city of Tangier to make it a lever for socio-economic and cultural development, is part of a partnership agreement signed recently between the Agency for the Development of the North, the Wilaya of the region, the Regional Council and the Tangier City Council, with a budget estimate amounting to 50 million dirhams. The Plaza Toro is an emblematic monument that reflects the plurality of the city's heritage.

Given this importance, an architectural consultation has been organized to involve the largest number of architects around the reflection on the city's heritage and to encourage the creative and innovative approach to the integration of heritage in the economic dynamics of Tangier. This project concerns the redevelopment of the Plaza Toro, in order to preserve the historical and architectural aspect of the building.

The space in its new version will be able to host large events, such as circuses, plays, concerts and competitions. The Plaza Toro will be converted into a space for economic, cultural and artistic

activities, with a diversified program that includes a performance space with 7,000 seats for a wide range of performing arts, as well as an exhibition, restaurant and commercial space.

Other historical sites are certainly known but unfortunately not at all exploited on the tourist level while they are among the oldest in the history of Morocco. This is the case of the ancient city of Volubilis, in the region of Meknes, which is probably considered the most important archaeological site in Morocco.

Classified as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, it was founded in the third century BC and then occupied by the Romans in 44 AD. The best-preserved buildings are the Capitoline temple, the basilica and the triumphal arch.

Although unknown, Volubilis is the rare witness of a very important period in the history of Morocco. In the same register, Chellah, near Rabat, lives the same abandonment. But not at the same level as Volubilis, according to experts. Unlike Volubilis, Chellah, also a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is a popular site for visitors.

To the south, Marrakech, although a major tourist destination for both nationals and foreigners, does not seem to have built its reputation on its archaeological sites, which count among dozens in an imperial city among the oldest in the Kingdom. The city is not known for its relics. However, it is home to some of the most beautiful monuments of the Saadian period.

In the south of the medina, near the Kasbah district, there are the Badii Palace and the Saadian tombs. Although it is in ruins, the palace impresses by its immensity. **As for the Saadian tombs, they are unfortunately in a lamentable state, totally abandoned, victims of a policy of serious neglect and lack of a bold renovation strategy.**

But an authorized source within the town hall of Marrakech specifies that a program of rehabilitation of the monuments of the city is under development. It will probably come into being early next year with the help of other administrations, including the Ministry of Culture.

In the meantime, it seems that cultural tourism has not yet managed to constitute a force to pull national tourism up. A hope still far-fetched that requires a real political will to develop this kind of tourism in the country.

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