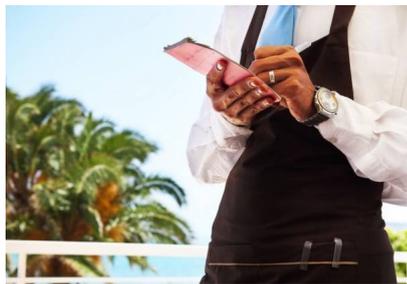


LONG AWAITED RETURN OF ALGERIAN TOURISTS IN TUNISIA



The reopening of land borders between Algeria and Tunisia is finally official and will be effective from July 15. A decision awaited like a messiah by tourism professionals, who suffer from the absence of Algerian tourists, an essential market for this vital sector in Tunisia.

In this regard, the Minister of Tourism and Handicrafts, Mohamed Moez Belhassine, chaired on July 7 coordination meeting in anticipation of the reception of Algerian tourists in Tunisia, so that it happens in the best possible conditions.

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, more than three million Algerians visited Tunisia each year. Even if they do not all choose hotels for accommodation, but rather rent apartments or villas, they contribute significantly to tourism revenues. This shows how much the reopening of the borders is a reason for joy for the professionals.

"It is a real breath of fresh air. We have largely pushed for the borders to reopen ... Today we can only rejoice," said Ahmed Bettaieb, President of the Tunisian Federation of Travel Agencies (FTAV).

Many agencies work with Algerian customers who come by land by offering them tours, he said.

"We don't want there to be a rush of tourists either because the structures may not be ready. But it's better to have an influx with problems than nothing at all. We have had a very difficult two years," he added.

However, with about a week to go before the reopening, hoteliers and other tourism professionals will have to prepare themselves very quickly, in financial conditions that are not obvious. The lack of liquidity, and the absence of financial aid from the State for new lines of credit with banks mean that today many establishments have not been able to reopen or bring their equipment up to standard.

"It is certain that there will be some problems. To solve them, we have set up a communication network between all the professionals of the sector in order to find solutions.

He added that "communication with customers is an essential tool to improve the quality of service. When there are problems, it is necessary to talk and explain the reasons, otherwise, it causes real disruptions as we see at the moment with the company Tunisair.

For his part, Khaled Fakhfakh, Vice President of the Tunisian Federation of the Hotel Industry, says that the return of Algerian tourists is good news for the whole year, not only for the summer season. The expert explains that the advantage with this clientele is that it goes to several regions of Tunisia which allows a better distribution of tourist revenues. "They go to Tabarka, Kairouan, Monastir, Sousse, Hammamet ...," he said.

Fakhfakh insists especially on the area of Tabarka, which has suffered more than others from the health crisis, because the majority of tourists are Tunisian and Algerian, in the absence of tour

operators in the region.

The return of Algerian tourists will help rebalance the outbound markets to avoid Tunisia "being held hostage to the European market," according to his words.

However, the professional adds that the opening of the Tunisian sky to the Open Sky is the last strategy for complete and developed tourism. "We need companies like Easy Jet or RyanAir to operate in Tunisia so as not to be dependent on national or international companies or TOs", concludes the professional.

Algerian travel agencies are already booking nights in hotels. The pace is gradually picking up. **The peak should arrive around July 20 according to some forecasts.**

In addition, Tunisian travel professionals share their fears concerning some hotels in difficulty and which have closed during the last two years and which have announced their reopening following the return of Algerian tourists. Many are asking how they will upgrade a hotel that has been closed for two years. And this can affect the loyalty of customers.

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