

TUNISIA REPORTS A STRONG TOURISM RECOVERY, BUT ...



After two years marked by the health crisis, Tunisian tourism is recovering. From the beginning of the year to the date of mid of September, tourist arrivals increased by 161.4% compared to the same period last year to reach 4.1 million visitors, according to data released by the Minister of Tourism, Mohamed Moez Belhassine.

Along with the increase in arrivals, overnight stays increased by 148.2% to 12.73 million. However, this number is down by 39.4% compared to 2019. In terms of tourist receipts at the end of August 2022, we report 2.67 billion Tunisian dinars (about US\$ 876 million), an increase of 82% compared to the same period last year. **But this increase remains in the sharp decline of 29.4% compared to 2019, the reference year, 2020 and 2021 having been marked by the catastrophic effects of the Covid-19 pandemic** on the sector, which lost 9 billion dinars.

On the strength of this tourism recovery, the Minister assured that the performance achieved by the sector will exceed the objectives set for 2022, namely to reach 50 to 60% of the level of activity of 2019. "This objective has been achieved and even exceeded in some regions," he explained.

Beyond the effects of the health crisis, the Tunisian tourism sector continues to suffer from its strategic positioning as a mass tourism destination. And this benefits above all to foreign tour operators who are pushing Tunisian hoteliers to compete and cut prices at the expense of the quality of services provided to tourists. Indeed, European tourists can, with 450 euros, benefit from a one-week all-inclusive stay. This explains the weakness of the country's tourist receipts.

This price cut benefits foreign TOs who rely on mass. However, this low-cost tourism has negative impacts on the Tunisian tourism recovery, and more specifically on hoteliers who face still low occupancy rates and high operating costs compared to revenue. **As a result, hoteliers find it difficult to invest in their establishments and improve the quality of service.**

This situation, combined with the impact of Covid-19, resulted in the bankruptcy of more than 350 hotel properties in Tunisia between 2018 and 2022. And according to professionals in the sector, bankruptcies will concern more hotels because of the lack of support from the authorities.

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