

TUNISIA'S TOURISM: REVENUES MASK DEEP STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES



Beyond the bright numbers, Tunisia's tourism industry faces quiet strain - nearly 8 billion dinars in earnings signal strength, though not immunity. Hidden beneath that gain lies sluggish decision-making within agencies meant to lead. Public backing has thinned over time, leaving gaps once filled by steady investment. Roads, hotels, and services creak under old designs, failing to match modern demand. Trouble may deepen by 2026, as early red flags begin to surface.

An Undervalued Economic Driver

Recently, Mohamed Yahyaoui - head of the Tourism Committee in Tunisia's parliament - spoke about the neglect facing the industry during a radio interview. **Although Tunisia's tourism brings in vital foreign income and helps stabilize trade, it remains overlooked.** Attention fades, even when economic benefits are clear. Resources stay limited, regardless of measurable impact. On airwaves, concerns emerged quietly but firmly.

One sign stands out: the sector lost 4 percent of its funding this year, even as management issues continue. Not by chance, says Yahyaoui - this pattern reveals how little weight decision makers give to an industry capable of anchoring broader economic recovery. Though small in appearance, such cuts signal deeper neglect. What looks like fiscal adjustment may instead be a failure to grasp long-term opportunity.

Early Worries About 2026

With summer 2026 approaching, signs of hesitation appear - bookings sit nearly 10 percent below last year's pace. Notably weak demand comes from major European regions, particularly France. Despite growing activity in planning, fewer travelers commit compared to previous trends.

Several factors explain this trend:

- Economic pressures in Europe, where squeezed household budgets lead to greater caution on leisure spending.
- Rising airfares, which increase the overall cost of trips.
- Heightened competition from other Mediterranean destinations like Spain and Greece, which are deploying aggressive promotions.

Still, experts warn about reading too much into the current numbers. Booking patterns now tilt toward spontaneity - travelers wait longer, which skews older metrics. Observers point out the dip isn't failure; it's adjustment, shaped by how people now engage with travel

Governance and Coordination Challenges

Split among several departments - Interior, Trade, Transport, Environment, and also Tourism - the main challenge arises from scattered authority. Where one function ends, another begins, creating blurred lines especially between the Ministry and the National Tourism Office. Though meant to guide policy through discussion, the High Council for Tourism barely operates under such conditions.

Slowed decisions drag out policy work. To fix this, Yahyaoi suggests one path - activate the High Council completely, holding frequent sessions. Another option appears clearer through coordination: form a cross-department team led straight by the Minister of Tourism. Movement improves when structure follows purpose.

Infrastructure Gaps and Investment Barriers of Tunisia's Tourism

Despite visible progress, real issues remain. Neglect marks many old coastal towns - maintenance lags, updates stall. With 164 hotels shut, fewer places welcome guests; appeal fades gradually. Old blueprints slow momentum, investors hold back. Around one billion dinars sits idle, blocked by dated strategies - Tabarka stands out among affected zones.

Air travel faces ongoing constraints. Smaller regional airfields operate without enough support or long-term planning, which restricts their role in reducing congestion at larger terminals while also weakening local tourism growth. While new trends like short-term lodging, nature-based trips, and immersive experiences gain interest, they falter under outdated rules that fail to keep pace with change. Recovery remains slow after widespread shutdowns during health crises; added financial burdens and complex paperwork continue deterring those looking to start or expand ventures.

Missed Chances and Legal Barriers

Despite the unrest in nearby Mediterranean regions, Tunisia has seen only limited gains in tourism appeal due to perceived safety advantages. Nearly 130 legislative proposals targeting industry upgrades have been introduced by members of parliament. Resistance arises mainly from government officials when changes touch sensitive areas like investment laws. **Outdated rules within the Investment Code still block progress, affecting local ventures as much as the international ones.** Progress stalls where political will weakens, even amid clear opportunities.

Tunis Awaits 2027 Arab Tourism Spotlight

Even with challenges, progress is visible. In 2027, Tunis takes on the role of Arab Capital of Tourism - a decision made at the 28th Arab Ministerial Council for Tourism held in Baghdad during December 2025. Moving forward, discussions between the Tourism Commission, travel firms, and ministry officials aim to shape a focused strategy.

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