

TOURISM IN ALGERIA

PresentationA North African land of contrasts, Algeria stretches over a 2 381 741 Km² area. Its 6000 Kilometer long borders run along Tunisia, Libya, Niger, Mali, Mauritania, Western Sahara and Morocco. In North, the Mediterranean Sea extends over 1200 km of coastline while in the South the extensive desert spreads over nearly two million square kilometers.

After having been neglected during many years, Algeria destination has experienced a renewed interest. This evolution has been marked by the appearance of new products beside the traditional stays of discovery and relaxation, while the Algerian government is setting up a strategy of development for tourism by the year 2015. Algeria has many assets. On the geographical level, four great types of relief following each other from the north to the south of the territory.

Alongside the Mediterranean sea, there is a coast bordered by beaches and coves, prolonged inside by the plain of Tell and its valleys where is concentrated the main part of the arable lands and the principal major cities like Algiers, Oran, and Constantine... there are two East-West directed mountainous chains: the Tellian Atlas formed by the mounts of Tlemcen, Ouarsenis, Titteri, Djurdjura, Babor, Bibans and Edough which culminates in Lalla Khadidja (2, 308m), and the Saharian Atlas with the solid mass of Aurès culminating with the mount of Chelia (2, 328m). In the middle of the Atlas, a zone of semi-desert high plateaus, field of the esparto grass and of breeding and whose profile of a basin explains the presence of shotts (salted lakes) up to 40 meters below sea level, the shott Melhrir. There is also the Sahara, its rock plateaus, its arid plains, its sand areas, the great Western erg, the great Eastern erg and its oases like Zibans, the valley of M’Zab, Touat, and Gourara... Finally in the extreme south, Hoggar, there is a succession of high plateaus spread out in steps, dominated in the centre by surprising relief and the Tahat mount, with 3 003 m which remains the highest summit of the country, and where there are some salted lakes like shott Ech-Chergui and shott el Hodna... To these natural charms is added an archaeological inheritance of a great value.

Crossroads of the Mediterranean, Moslem and African worlds, Algeria inherited a number of numidian and Romans sites, (in the east of Mauritania, in Aurès and in the north of Numidia), as well as Christian and Islamic sites and buildings.

Various activities can be practiced during all the year in focal points where exoticism and beauty go hand in hand:

- The coastal strip
- The Aurès Mountains
- The Kabylie region
- The Wadi Me Zab valley
- Oued Souf
- The Hoggar Mountains and Tassili
- Touat and Gourara

A country of virgin sitesAlgeria has 174 zones of tourist expansion spread all over the country and which are concerned by the tourism investment. For this reason, the Ministry of tourism invites all national or foreign organizations to invest in this very profitable market. According to forecasts of the ministry of tourism, by the year 2015, tourist flow will pass to 3.1 million visitors against 1.6 million in 2004 and the cumulated payments of the tourist activity would be in 2015 of more than 6 billion dollars. Currently, 22 ZET are subject to a development study held by the National Agency of Tourist Development (ANDT). Nineteen of the ZET retained for study are located on the littoral extending over more than 1,200 km and the three others are in Tamanrasset, Djanet and Timimoun. However, the 22 concerned ZET totalize a surface of development equivalent to 1443.83 hectares. These sites are part of the projects of realization of 144 hotels, 550 villas, 3000 bungalows, 8 marinas and pleasure ports, 4 spas, 15 shopping centres and 4 sports centres. These tourist achievements must generate a capacity of lodging of 50,000 beds. However the ZET of Djanet and Tamanrasset have the priority and must be subject to a special consideration since they are a privileged destination by foreign tourists and also because of the sensitivity of their ecosystem. For that reason, a sustainable strategy for the development of tourism in Algeria by 2015 has been planned , with several incentives.

This strategy is particularly based on the definition of the choice of the tourist offers to be developed, the determination of the objectives to be reached as well as the determination of the socio-economic impacts.

Concerning the development and the control of tourism real estate, the development of a program and the launching of a study for the delimitation and the declaration of the zones of tourist expansion are expected. It is also expected to achieve, by 2007 a study relating to the thermal assessment, which potential is evaluated to more than 200 thermal sources, and to the transfer of the lands in the chosen ZET to the ANDT. The objective is to develop these lands and to put them at the disposal of the investors, as well as providing consequent financial means to the Fund for Support to the Tourist Investment. It is also expected, by 2015, to realize 187,000 beds, that is to say 55,000 beds in 2007 and 60,000 beds in 2015 with 23,000 direct and indirect employment. However, this objective needs some incentives to the tourist investment, like an adequate adaptation to the tourist mode of financing which remains a heavy investment. It is also expected the creation of a mode of financing specific to the hotel credits which must profit from reduced interest rate and other incentives

ALGIERS Hung to the hills of the Sahel at the end of the plain of Mitidja, Algiers presents the traditional urban plan of a Mediterranean city: an acropolis - the Kasbah leaned with a massif- Bouzareah -, and a set of hills intersected with small valleys forming a majestic bay, which extends from the Pointe Pescade to La Pérouse. Even if the Moorish palaces have for many disappeared, Algiers the White remains one of the most beautiful cities of the Arab world. It is while strolling around the twisting roads, the staircase-like backstreets, the monuments and the modern district that one can discover this metropolis which summarizes the whole Algeria of today, a country rooted in his traditions and passionate of modernity.

The Casbah

Overhanging the small islands, the médina remains Algiers bearing the prints of the Orientalists of XVIe, XVIIe and XVIIIe centuries and if the ramparts disappeared, the impression is remaining. Half of the houses is of Ottoman inspiration: corbelled floors supported by apparent wood props, interior patio decorated with ceramics and small columns. Place of memory as much as place of history, the Kasbah has a citadel, old mosques, Ottoman palaces, a labyrinth of souks, eternal paradise for shopping, and of small bars where it is good to stop to taste a chorba frik, ragout of mutton meat with chick-peas, followed-up with mint tea.

Palaces El Djazair El Mahroussa had sumptuous palaces decorated with taste and pomp. Today, although many of these buildings worthy of Thousand and One Nights disappeared, some have escaped to the vagaries of time and of the Man. They are here to remind us our prestigious past. They only can be a very privileged tourist destination.

Dar Aziza, is the prototype of the Algerian house with his court of marble and central water jet, its earthenware, its stuccos and its trellis with coloured glass, next to Jenina (headquarter of the government until 1817). It is at the palace Dar Mustapha, built by Dey Mustapha in 1797, that are noticed the front door and the canopy in sculpted cedar, two skiffas (corridors) decorated with Dutch and Italian earthenware, the columns of marble, the sculpted woodworks, the balustrades and the double doors of rooms with porticos.

The Bastion 23 is the palace of the captain Raïs, built on the sea front in 1826 and inhabited by the Minister for the navy who could thus control the bay. This palace had a hammam built above the kitchen to diffuse a constant heat, a wash-house supplied with two wells, one containing the drinking water, the second collecting rainwater. This building which is open to the public is composed of three parts: the residence of Raïs where the living rooms, rooms, dining room and office are decorated with different ceramics and of sculpted woodworks. There is also the district of the servants, the small houses intended to the sailors and to the fishermen. While descending the street Hadj Omar, there is the palace of Ahmed Pasha (1805-1808). It provides a base for Algerian National Theatre, equipped with a beautiful staircase with elbows leading to the interior court.

Dar Hassan, is a Moorish palace of Hassan Dey of Algiers and the last of the regents at the end of XVIIIe century. It has been transformed into a winter palace of the French governors and will was known as the Palais Bruce.

The Big Mosque, was built at the end of XIst century by the Almoravides. It is a magnificent example of the Islamic architecture. There are five doors leading to the interior and a patio looks out over the old court of malékite rite and over the office of the muphti. In the prayer room, there is an admirable minbar (pulpit) dated of 1098 and some foiled arcs.

The mosque of la Pêcherie, is a rather particular monument which would have been built in 1660 by the corporation of bahhâras (marines). Its minbar, made of sculpted marble, belonging to the old mosque Essayida. Some old koursis (armchairs) are also worthy of being admired. They belonged to the preachers and are made of painted wood and a very beautiful copper chandelier close to the minaret, the old court of hanéilte rite.

The Betchine mosque was built in 1622 by the Italian corsair Picinino who became admiral of the Algerian fleet. It has a typical architecture of the Ottoman mosques.

The old cathedral Saint Philippe, built between 1845 and 1860 and called Djamaâ Ennassara by the Inhabitants of Algiers, returned to the Moslem worship after the independence and recovered its old name “Ketchawa” (plate of goats, in Turkish). Its columns and its minbar belong to the old mosque. The frontage, flanked by two tours, is inspired from the Byzantine architecture.

At the street Arbadji, the tomb of the saint patron of the town of Algiers: Sidi Abderrahmane. The building was built in 1696. It is composed of a koubba where the tomb rests, of the saint man of a mosque to the square minaret and a cemetery reserved to the famous men such as Ahmed Bey of Constantine and Mustapha Pasha.

Among the other historical buildings of the old médina of El Djezair, there is Hammam Sidna, and the baths of the Dey, which have always been working since the XVIe century. In the east of Algiers, the turquoise coast provides a home for beautiful rock coves and sandy beaches lined with cypress, cork oaks and olive-trees. The peninsula of Sidi Ferruch has a marina and offers possibilities of underwater fishing.

Oran, bordered with wine fields, is the second town of Algeria. Activate, dynamic, it is the centre of multiple trade and industrial activities around its port. The influence of the Spaniards, having occupied the city during almost three centuries, is visible through many Hispanic-Moorish buildings. Around Oran, there are several seaside centres composed of hotels provided with nautical equipment.... Antique cities Ancient cities such as Timgad, Tipaza, Djemila, Hippone and many others appear among the most beautiful archaeological vestiges, both by the beauty of the ruins and their historical and scientific value.

Timgad

Released since 1880, this perched city at 100 m of altitude had a theatre, 14 thermal baths, a capitole, a public library equipped with a unique semicircular reading room, a “civil basilica,” kind of law courts, a Christian necropolis, in which some 10,000 tombs can be found, markets with shops, and a theatre which can contain 3,500 spectators. Its triumphal arch, set up in the IInd century in the honor of the victory of Trajan over the Parthes, is one of the most beautiful of the Roman empire. Its temple, set up on a platform accessible through a 38 step, had a pediment with six columns (two have been restored). There was also a donatist cathedral in the south-west of the city and a large Christian monastery.

But it is in the cultural richness that the originality of Timgad lays. From the Ist to the IIIrd century, the city had its architects, its decorators and its Numid mosaists. In the IInd and IIIrd century, they created new ways, less regular taking into account the relief, as well as new districts, and the theatre, positioned on the side of hillock. The museum of Timgad

shelters one of the most beautiful collections of mosaics of all Algeria. After ten years of interruption, the city joined again with its festival of popular art. "Aurès in Festival", represents two weeks of galas, and cultural and handcraft shows. The tapestry of Aurès, very well known beyond the Algerian borders, receives the honors it deserves.

Tipaza

Baptized "Pine setting", Tipaza has the charm of the towns of sea-side and mountain. Nested on the foot of the Chenoua mount, top of 900 m snow-covered during winter and going down towards a broad beach, it was occupied as from the middle paleolithic. The Rassel cave close to Chenoua would have been inhabited 12.000 years ago AC. Several civilizations followed one another. Recent excavations released the remainders of a tusk integrated into the ramparts and a necropolis with columbarium.

In the oldest district of Tipaza, can be found the "legal basilica", in which the splendid mosaic of the slaves was discovered, and that is exposed in the town museum.

Djemila

Djemila was founded by the Nerva emperor in the North-East of Sétif at the edge of the Ferdjioua mounts. Half way up of a soft slope towards the confluence of two oueds (rivers) Guergour and Betane, in which the valleys take forms of torrential gorges. This city with its temples and its basilicas with 900 meters of altitude is another remarkable example of the adaptation of the diagrams of Roman town planning to the environment

The Sahara, the land of peace The plate of Tassili Ajjer, maze of cliffs and dunes in the north of Djanet, is the most popular circuit of the great Saharan south. Accessible in a four-wheel-drive or on a camel's ride, it makes it possible to discover the reliefs and the rupestral art of the plateau, witness of the everyday life at one time when the Sahara was timbered and crossed with rivers.

Some sites are pure wonders, in particular Jabbaren, Tamrit and Sefar. One can also choose to spend one week in Hoggar on the traces of Father Charles of Foucault, founder of the congregation of the little brothers of Jesus, who spent five months in Assekrem. This perched refuge has 2,180 meters, and offers a superb panorama on the Tahat mount. A four-wheel-drive climbs easily up to the hermitage where one can spend the night, and that can be reached after five hour drive; then one has to use a path dug in the rock which leads there (15 minutes of easy climbing). The moments to be looked forward to are the sunrise and the sunset. Two brothers of Jesus always live in Assekrem and celebrate the mass there.

Tamanrasset, first urban crossroads while arriving from Niger, entry gate to the Tassili of the Hoggar and the starting point of excursions, is not any more the small village "animated with 20 fires" as described by Charles de Foucauld. The city, with the obsolete charm and the apathetic atmosphere, deserves that we dwell on it. With a population of 70,000 inhabitants, "Tam" is the administrative capital of the area and military reserve.

The trekking from Atakor to Taessa within a wild framework of the Hoggar of 1800 to 3000 m makes it possible to approach the Tuareg society in its traditional life. Taessa, granitic Massif, spread over more than 60 km, is a privileged place for the campings of Kel Ahagar. We travel from Atakor, central part of the Massif of the Hoggar, to Taessa, to admire its rosy granites, its gueltas* in stages at the bottom of gorges covered with pink laurels or olive-trees, its cliffs overhanging from the green valleys and varied fauna. The surrounding austerity shows why this bastion could keep for so long the men's legend.

Frescos of Tassili

Compared to the European rupestral art, primarily animalist and hidden within caves hollow, the rupestral art of Tassili is very scenic and, most of the time, on the surface. In addition, the communications between North Africa and Europe having been crossed since the end of the medium Palaeolithic, this art has remained both independent and African until the Christian era.

Oases

To understand the soul of Algeria, its oases should be seen: Holy Cities of Ghardaia, Blessed Izguen, El Ateuf, Bou Noura and Mélika, founded by Ibadites, puritans of Islam, in the "Zab country at the entry of the great south, and the oases of the Chaambas and Gouraris tribes.

UNESCO classified sites

Timgad is a military colony created by the III August legion in the year 100 by Emperor Trajan on the northern slopes of the Aurès Mountain range (province of Batna);

Tipaza was a Punic counter and a strategic base for the Roman conquest of the Mauretanian kingdoms. It was listed among the 33 sites of the world's endangered heritage by the 26th Session of the Committee of the World Heritage in Budapest on June 26, 2002;

Djemila, the antique Circul, is located at about 30 km from Sétif;

Tassili "Ajjer (provinces of Ouargla and Tamanrasset) is the vastest museum of prehistoric rock art in the world. More than 15,000 drawings and engravings tell the stories of the climates, fauna and the human life in the Sahara from 6,000 BCE to the early centuries of our era;

Kalâat Béni-Hammade in Bechara (province of "sila), is a Moslem stronghold, founded in 1007 and was the first capital of the Hammadite emirs;

The M’Zab Valley (province of Laghouat) whose k’sours (fortified villages) preserved the habitat created in the tenth century by the Ibadites;

The Casbah, the legendary Islamic medina in the capital Algiers.

Local Feats: a symbol of our cultural identity Algeria is a nation with multiple facets. Its traditions are colorful and handed down from one generation to the next. Algeria's local festivals are organized all year round throughout the country. From the north to the south, each area has its own festival that it celebrates with splendor.

A symbol of popular traditions, the local festivals have become an occasion for organizing tourist stays to discover the marvelous sites of each one of its areas and to share the joy of the local populations with their legendary hospitality.

On the whole, no less than 256 local festivals are celebrated annually throughout the various areas of the country.

Tafsit of Tamanrasset

For three days, the people of the Hoggar gather in Tamanrasset to celebrate the arrival of spring in an atmosphere of festival rich in colors. Folk band processions are organized through the streets of the city to the great delight of the local people and tourists who come in large numbers to share the joys of this festival where the traditional craft industry occupies a privileged place… Fashion parades and beauty contests are organized on this occasion to elect “Miss Hoggar” and the best Tuareg of the region.

S'biba of Djanet

In Djanet, the capital of the Tassili, the religious feast of Achoura is always celebrated joyfully. The populations gather to renew the peace pact sealed nearly three thousand years ago and to establish new alliances. In ancient times, a fratricidal war was raging between Tuareg tribes. When they learned that Moses defeated the Pharaoh and his armies they agreed to end their conflict and to seal a peace pact which has united them since then. Exhibition fights recreating the last battle following which the peace pact was signed are performed on this occasion while women sing in the background and utter their traditional ‘yuyu’ screams intended to encourage the warriors.

S’Boue of Timimoun

Like the Tassili, the Gourara area is known for its festivals in which the traditional songs of the “Ahellil” bands are omnipresent. Organized during the mawlid, the feast celebrating the birth of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), the S'boue (week) is a festival that lasts seven days and seven nights. The seventh day, all the people of the K'sour gather around the zaouia (religious school) of Sheikh El Hadj Belkacem for a large gathering where the standards of the brotherhoods are exhibited to the beat of the Ahellil songs.

The celebration of this festival is also an opportunity for gathering the local population to settle any quarrels which may arise during the year and to seal new alliances.

Mawlid of Béni-Abbès

In the vicinity of Béchar, northwards, the sumptuous oasis of Béni-Abbès celebrates lavishly the birth of the Prophet. On the day of the Mawlid, the small square of the town is the center of a great deal of excitement with karkabou music and local dances. This religious festival is also an opportunity for the circumcision of the children and meetings between the families of the Saoura.

Mawsim Taghit

The Saoura region organizes, in the last weekend of October, a great celebration, the “Mawssim Taghit”. This festival is dedicated to the date and offerings are made to the poorest sections of the population. The date harvest is an opportunity to gather all of the inhabitants of the Saoura in this age-old festival which dates back more than 19 centuries. The tradition is celebrated during three days to the beat of the bendir, the goubri and songs chanted in chorus.

Ouaâdat Sidi Ahmed El Medjdoub

Celebrated in the second weekend of every October, Ouaâdat Sidi Ahmed El Medjdoub takes place in the commune of Asla (province of Nâama) in honor of the saint man Sidi Ahmed El Medjdoub who lived in the 15th century.

The festival is organized by the Medjadba tribe to preserve and perpetuate local traditions and habits during which couscous and tea are served to all the guests. During the feast, fantasia exhibitions are performed, poetry contests and a major commercial event are organized, and miscellaneous goods are offered on sale so that the inhabitants supply themselves to face the harsh winter.

Ghardaïa Carpet Festival

In the M’Zab valley, the spring holidays provide an opportunity for craftsmen from all parts of the country to exhibit and sell their carpets. Enlivened by Karkabou bands which play percussions based rhythms and fire gunshots in the air, this festival is an exotic tourist attraction. Visits to the five towns of the region are organized for tourists in M’Zab valley. A legendary market for auction sales is held in one of the towns, Béni-Izguen.

More than a traditional festival, this event is an artistic contest in which craftsmen compete in a convivial atmosphere.

M’Doukal Fantasia

During the first weekend of every month of May, a festival is held in the Aurès region. The palm groves and K'sours of M’Doukal located ten kilometers from the famous ghoufi ‘balconies’, provide a magnificent landscape for the fantasia shows during which horsemen dressed in traditional clothing exhibit their most beautiful horses.

The spirit of the popular singer Aïssa El Djermouni is reminisced everywhere during the three days of this festival.

Popular poetry contests are also organized

Daghmouli Festival

Around the mausoleum of Moulay Abderrahmane, the Hoggar tribes: Kel-Rela, Kel-Rebla, Kel-Abagar, Issabaten and Tedjiène - flock together to celebrate the daghmouli (dawn of holiness) in homage to the Hoggar Tuaregs (probably the DImenan tribe), who rebelled against the French in 1902. The ziara (visit of the mausoleum) lasts two days on specific dates, in May.

Ath Khlili Pottery Festival

In the village of the Mâatkas, an area situated south of Tizi-Ouzou, potters and pottery has been holding center stage for nine years now. The clayware trade in this locality is primarily feminine. Ath Khlili's women are famous for the quality of their potteries whose decorations are inspired from the Berber symbolic system.

Ath Yenni Silver Jewel Festival

From July 27th to August 4th, a festival is organized at Ath Yenni to celebrate silver jewels. The jewels of this region are set with coral and decorated with yellow enamel (for the sun), green colors (for nature) and blue ones (for the sky). The village is perched high in the Djurdjura mountain range at an altitude of more than 900 meters. These Kabyle jewels have won international awards, particularly in Canada and the United States.

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In this easternmost town of the Algerian coast bordering with Tunisia, the coral festival gathers fishermen, craftsmen and other tradesmen in August. Algerian coral, which regenerates quickly after fishing, is exported to many countries. El Kala's coral, as well as Bejaia's, is famous for its quality and its rare rose tones. Heather wood is another wealth of this area; it is used to manufacture internationally famous pipes.

Saint Augustine, the AlgerianA Phoenician trading post established in the eleventh century BC, Hippone was a flourishing numide city, ally of Carthage, until the fall of this latter. In the third century BC, Gaïa, father of Massinissa, turned it into one of the capitals of his kingdom. After the defeat of Jugurtha, Numide Hippone was annexed to the Roman province of Africa Nova, and became the most prosperous of the pre-Roman Africa cities as well as the center of African Christianity. In the fifth century, it was invaded and ransacked by Genseric. The vandals settled in Hippone for a whole century and the Byzantines just as long. Archeological excavations revealed the residential district, from which originate most of the splendid mosaics displayed in the museum of the city, as well as the Christian district. The history of Hippone is closely connected to the life of Saint Augustine, the most famous of the Latin Church's Fathers.

Recently, some tour operators set up a circuit called "On the footsteps of Saint Augustine" for foreigners interested in cultural and religious trips. In the program: the basilica and ruins of Hippone; the Punic and Roman center of the antique Calama in Guelma; the vestiges of the small amphitheatre; and Saint Augustine's school Madaure.

- Algérie memoire et miroirs
- Algérie Sud
- Algérie Balnéaire
- Le patrimoine Romain en Algérie
- Les Ruines Romaines d'Algérie
- Hoggar_ &_Tassili
- Oasis
- Saoura
- Sources Thérmals
- Saint Augustin