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The State of Cultural and Recreational Tourism in Tunisia

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Abstract

The tourism sector is considered one of the most important economic sectors and plays a significant role in the development of the economies of many countries owing to its ability to generate foreign currency and provide employment opportunities, not to mention its crucial contribution to the advancement of other economic sectors. Accordingly, numerous countries across the world have accorded great importance. The Tunisian state has formulated strategic plans to develop the tourism sector and increase tourist inflows, relying on the diversification of tourism products, foremost recreational sports activities and traditional cultural activities. This study seeks to examine the role of recreational sports and cultural activities in diversifying tourism products and to shed light on the current state of tourism resources in Tunisia to benefit from this pioneering experience in the field of tourism development.

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Introduction

Tourism plays a significant role in supporting the economies of many countries, owing to its impact on generating foreign currency and providing employment opportunities, in addition to its contribution to strengthening other economic sectors. All of this has rendered the tourism sector of paramount importance within the economic policies of these countries, particularly those endowed with significant natural, cultural, and historical resources. Tunisia has been among the countries that have accorded considerable importance to the tourism sector, given its substantial economic impact.

The Tunisian state has mobilised all the resources at its disposal, foremost cultural assets, which it has prioritised to support the tourism industry. To this end, Tunisia has actively promoted cultural activities such as artistic festivals, recreational games, and traditional practices, especially in desert regions that lack conventional tourism attractions capable of drawing visitors. A notable example of this is the Douz Festival, which is regarded as one of the most prominent cultural festivals in North Africa, incorporating recreational sports activities alongside cultural expression.

Therefore, the central research question may be posed as follows:

What is the role of recreational sports activities in the development of Tunisian tourism?

To respond to the research question, this study has been divided into three principal axes as follows:

- **First axis:** The cultural resources of tourism in Tunisia.
- **Second axis:** The current state of cultural and recreational tourism in Tunisia.
- The third axis concerns the role of cultural and recreational activities in supporting the tourism sector.

First Axis: Cultural Resources of Tourism in Tunisia

The Tunisian state possesses substantial cultural resources that have made it an attractive destination for tourists seeking cultural experiences. Tunisia is home to a wide range of museums and festivals, which position the country as a distinguished pole of tourism. The principal cultural tourism resources may be summarised as follows:

First: Museums in Tunisia

1. The National Bardo Museum

The National Bardo Museum is the largest in the world devoted to Roman mosaics. It houses numerous artefacts that testify to the civilisations that passed through Tunisia during the prehistoric era. The museum contains several important halls, including the Hall of Roman Carthage, the Virgil Hall, the Dougga Hall, the Mahdia Hall, the Christian Mosaic Hall, and the Sousse Hall of Arab Art. The museum itself is located within one of the palaces of the Beys.

2. The National Museum of Carthage

Established in 1875, the museum was initially named after Cardinal Lavigerie. In 1956, its name was changed to the Museum of Carthage, and it was opened to the public in 1963. Situated in the city of Carthage, it contains archaeological remains from ancient times and from various civilisations that succeeded one another in Tunisia. Its collections include punic artefacts, such as engraved sarcophagi and funerary objects, as well as Roman remains, including mosaics and statues. The museum also preserves items from the Christian and Byzantine periods.

3. The National Museum of Chemistry

Located in the governorate of Jendouba, the museum was inaugurated in 1997. Most of its artefacts are made of marble, as it is situated at an ancient marble quarry dating back to the Roman era. The museum contains statues from Numidian civilisation, Roman tombstones, and other funerary monuments.

4. The Raqqada Museum

The Raqqada Museum is a major centre of Islamic art. It houses rare objects from Islamic civilisation, such as pottery, coins, and other artefacts. Among its many halls is one dedicated to various forms of the Qur'ānic manuscript, including the celebrated Blue Qur'ān. Another hall contains valuable materials such as crystals and bronze pieces. The museum was built within one of the Aghlabid palaces in the city of Raqqada, near Kairouan.

5. The Museum of Arts and Popular Traditions at Dar Ben Abdallah

In 1978, this museum was located in the capital of Medina, Tunis. It presents examples of traditional Tunisian crafts and feature decorations in the Andalusian style. The museum itself is housed in a nineteenth-century palace.

6. The Museum of Arts and Popular Traditions at Dar Jellouli

Established in the eighteenth century in the heart of the city of Sfax, this museum illustrates the daily life of the inhabitants of Sfax. It contains a collection of traditional products reflecting the material culture of the region.

7. The Military Museum (Palace of al-Ward)

Situated in one of Beys' palaces, built in 1798 during the reign of Hammouda Pasha Bey, this building was officially converted into a museum on 25 June 1984. It presents the military history of Tunisia, from Hannibal and his campaign in Europe to the country's independence. The museum also preserves treaties and various military uniforms.

Tunisia additionally possesses numerous municipal museums, among which the most significant are the Archaeological Museum of Douz, the Archaeological Museum of Enfidha, the Archaeological Museum of Kef, the Archaeological Museum of Mahdia, the Museum of Nabeul, and the Museum of Zarzis.

Second: Festivals in Tunisia

Tunisia is home to a rich variety of festivals, estimated at approximately 1,069 in total, of which 422 take place during the summer season. The most prominent among them include the following:

1. The Festival of the Desert Castles (Tataouine)

Held in the city of Tataouine in southern Tunisia, this festival is considered one of the most significant. It features a wide range of musical performances, poetry recitals, and folk ensembles. During the festival, participants move among the desert castles, which stand as enduring witnesses to desert life, numbering approximately 150. The festival is one of the major tourist attractions, particularly for foreign visitors, most notably Libyans, who greatly appreciate the popular poetry that constitutes the cornerstone of the event.

2. The Carthage Film Festival

Organised biennially in October since its establishment in 1966, this festival includes numerous competitions related to cinema, such as competitions for feature-length and short films. Each edition honours a renowned cinematic personality or one of the participating countries. It has become a notable destination for tourists with a keen interest in film.

3. The Gafsa Fortress Festival

Among the most important festivals in southern Tunisia, this event focuses on cultural expression and hosts Arab artists. It is distinctive in its dedication to Maghrebi groups, inviting stars from Algeria and Morocco as well as traditional folk ensembles. The festival also features numerous theatrical productions and film screenings.

4. The Tunis Furniture Exhibition

Organised by the Tunis Exhibition Company at the Kram Exhibition Palace, this fair specialises in furniture. It gathers hundreds of exhibitors and presents a diverse array of old, new, and traditional furniture. The exhibition attracts many visitors, including artisans, manufacturers, and major international companies operating in this field.

Third: Human resource development in the tourism sector

The training and development of human resources in the tourism sector is of paramount importance in achieving the objectives of this industry. This is due to the intensive interaction between service providers and tourists, which led Tunisia to establish its first tourism school in the governorate of Bizerte in 1960, within the framework of cooperation with Germany. Since then, the number of tourism schools has steadily increased, reaching eight institutions today, consisting of one higher institute, two training centers, and five tourism schools.

1. The Higher Institute of Tourism Studies at Sidi Dhrif for Advanced Training

The institute was established by Decree No. 2325, dated 22 August 2005, under the joint supervision of the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. Admission requires a baccalaureate certificate. Students may obtain the following qualifications:

▪ **Applied degree in hospitality management:**

Awarded after three years of study under the *Licence-Master-Doctorat (LMD)* system, it was divided into six semesters. The programme includes two specialisations: accommodation and catering.

▪ **Applied Degree in Tourism Techniques:**

After three years of study under the LMD system, the data were divided into six semesters. This programme offers two specialisations: the management of tourism products and tour guidance. In the final semester, students are required to submit a report following the completion of a practical internship.

2. Vocational training in tourism and hospitality

To align the educational system with economic dynamics, numerous training centres and schools have been established in the tourism sector, responding to the growing labour market demand for these specialisations and the strategic programme of the Tunisian state to develop tourism. Graduates of these institutions obtain qualifications that enable them to work in the sector, namely, the certificate of professional competence, the technician diploma, and the senior technician diploma. These qualifications cover a variety of fields, such as hospitality and catering, in all their specialisations.

The principal schools and training centres for tourism are as follows:

- The Sousse North Tourism School
- The Djerba Tourism School
- The Tozeur Tourism School
- The Monastir Tourism School
- The Ain Draham Tourism School
- The Nabeul Tourism Training Centre
- The Hammamet Tourism and Hospitality Training Centre
- The Higher Vocational Institute of Tourism at Larijia

Second Axis: Current State of Cultural and Recreational Tourism in Tunisia

This section defines cultural and recreational tourism and presents the most significant tourist areas in Tunisia.

First: Definition of Cultural and Recreational Tourism

1. Cultural Tourism

Cultural tourism involves tourists' visits to archaeological and historical sites, as well as to the remains of ancient civilisations and museums. Smith defined cultural tourism as "the tourist's absorption of the manifestations of past life of ancient societies." Ritchie and Zins characterised cultural tourism as a core element of attraction in tourist destinations, identifying twelve cultural components that draw tourists to specific locations: handicrafts; language; traditions; dietary customs; art and music, including engraving and sculpture; the history of the region, including surviving monuments; the types of work carried out by the inhabitants and the technologies employed; architecture that lends a distinctive character to the area; religion, including its visible expressions; educational systems; clothing; and leisure activities.

Cultural tourism accounts for approximately 10% of international tourism flows and is one of the means through which nations can showcase their cultural heritage and ancient assets. This centrality renders it a matter of global interest.¹ The Algerian legislature has defined cultural tourism as any form of recreation in which the principal motivation is the pursuit of knowledge through the discovery of urban heritage—such as towns, villages, historical monuments, gardens, and religious buildings—or through intangible heritage, including traditional ceremonies and national or local customs.²

2. Recreational Tourism

Recreational tourism is the most common type of tourism worldwide, where tourists enjoy moderate climatic conditions, vast green spaces, natural parks, and picturesque landscapes. The primary purpose of this form of tourism is to spend holidays in leisure, entertainment, and recreation, as well as to make use of free time. The duration of such tourism can be as short as a single day, whereby small groups may visit a tourist destination in the morning and return the same day, with the distance to the attraction typically ranging from 50–250 kilometres.³

Among the most prominent global destinations renowned for such trips are the coasts of Nice and Cannes in France, as well as sites in Spain, Morocco, Tunisia, and Lebanon. In 2004, recreational tourism accounted for 70% of the total number of international tourists.⁴

Second: Tourist Regions in Tunisia

Tunisia has been divided into fifteen tourist regions according to the tourism products offered and their geographical location. These regions include:

- **Tunis (the Capital):**

A Mediterranean city renowned for its ancient Medina, founded five centuries ago, and distinguished by its architecture reflecting the civilisations that succeeded one another, such as the Aghlabids, the Hafsids, the Beys, and the Ottomans. The Medina is also notable for its vibrant markets filled with traditional crafts, its unique cafés, and its narrow alleyways. In contrast, modern Tunis is characterised by its contemporary neighbourhoods, luxury buildings, grand hotels, and wide boulevards.

- **Carthage:**

Constructed upon the site of ancient Carthage—once a global power—this area comprises three small towns: La Marsa, Sidi Bou Said, and Carthage. Carthage itself is a living history book that accounts for the passage of various civilisations. Founded by the Phoenician princess Elyssa, the city was later influenced by the Greeks and subsequently destroyed by the Romans, who burned its Punic harbours. The National Museum of Carthage displays an extensive collection of artefacts, columns, and statues. The city also retains notable Roman remains, including the Antonine Baths and the Roman theatre, which today hosts a summer arts festival. Carthage further offers a range of luxury hotels and affordable lodgings.

- **Bizerte:**

Located approximately 65 kilometers from Tunis, Bizerte, like other Tunisian cities, boasts an ancient Medina situated at its center and surrounded by elegant suburbs. Within the Medina, the Andalusian Quarter displays distinct architectural styles, whereas the Kasbah dates back to the Aghlabid era. The village of Rafraf is renowned for its beaches and Andalusian-style farmlands. The city also houses the Ottoman-era naval base of Ghar el-Melh and Ottoman fortresses. The ancient city of Dougga, founded in the fourth century BCE, stands as one of the region's most impressive archaeological sites. In addition, the ruins of Utica, located on the outskirts of Bizerte, constitute one of the oldest ports in northern Tunisia and are believed to be the earliest Phoenician settlement in North Africa, established in 1101 BCE. Its archaeological museum preserves statues and Roman mosaics.

- **Hammamet – Nabeul:**

Hammamet and Nabeul are located on a peninsula that stretches like an outstretched hand toward Europe, lying approximately 140 kilometers from Sicily. The region, known as the *Cap Bon* or *the Peninsula of Tunisia*, has historically served as a gateway from Europe and was therefore frequently targeted by invaders. As a result, castles and fortresses were constructed to repel aggressors. The area is equally distinguished by its traditional industries, including pottery, wrought iron, and mat weaving. Hammamets and Nabeul are celebrated for their stunning beaches and a wide range of marine sports, such as pleasure boating, diving, and canoeing. They also host various festivals in music, theatre, and dance. In terms of accommodation, the region offers diversity, ranging from luxury hotels to affordable family residences. Additionally, the area is notable for its high-quality thalassotherapy centres and world-class golf facilities, with two renowned courses located in Hammamet: the *Citrus golf* and the *Yasmine golf course*.

- **Yasmine Hammamet:**

Yasmine Hammamet is regarded as a new tourism hub, distinguished by its wide boulevards, luxury hotels, and numerous recreational and entertainment venues. It also features a Medina constructed in an authentic Arab architectural style, known for its narrow alleyways and shops selling traditional crafts. Entry into Medina is through monumental gates inspired by Tunisian heritage. Along the seafront, cafés and clubs line the beach, offering vibrant social spaces. Within Medina lies *Carthage Land*, an amusement park narrating tales of Carthaginian pirates and sailors, complete with statues of Hannibal's elephants, thus presenting Tunisian history in a visually engaging manner. The region is also renowned for its thalassotherapy centers, thermal baths, and natural oil massage services.

- **Tabarka – Ain Draham:**

Situated in the far northwest of Tunisia, where the mountains meet the waters of the Mediterranean Sea, this region, like many others in Tunisia, is rich in historical landmarks, such as the Basilica—now an exhibition hall but formerly a church during the French era—and the Genoese Fort, named after the Italian city of Genoa. The area is notable for its jewellery craftsmanship, made possible by the abundance of coral found here. Tabarka is also a prime destination for diving, famed for its rocky seabed rich in coral and remarkable marine biodiversity. The city hosts an 18-hole golf course covering 110 hectares, interspersed with eucalyptus and pine forests, which has been the site of several international tournaments. Moreover, Tabarka is internationally recognised for its annual Jazz Festival, which gathers renowned global artists and major bands and has inspired the creation of other music festivals in genres such as Rai and Latin music.

The nearby village of Ain Draham is celebrated for its dense forests, while close to it lies the village of Hammam Bourguiba, a thermal spa renowned since antiquity for its healing waters.

- **Sousse – Port El Kantaoui:**

The city of Sousse was founded by the Phoenicians prior to Carthage and was initially named *Hadrumetum*. It was later controlled successively by the Carthaginians, the Romans, and the Byzantines and was eventually conquered by Muslims under the leadership of the Companion 'Uqba ibn Nāfi'. Its Medina is distinguished by a protective wall guarding against attacks from the sea, as well as its Great Mosque, built in 850 CE by the Aghlabid emir Abū al-'Abbās Muhammad. The city is further noted for its massive fortress, the Kasbah, its closely set shops, and its traditional crafts. Sousse and Port El Kantaoui are also recognised for a variety of sports, including tennis, golf, horse riding, and diving. Moreover, Sousse is considered the birthplace of thalassotherapy in Tunisia, with the first facility established in the city centre in 1994, which later expanded into numerous centres under the supervision of specialised medical teams.

- **Monastir:**

A small city characterised by its fine sandy beaches and luxury hotels, Monastir was known during the Roman era as *Ruspina*. The city is distinguished by its formidable walls, historical landmarks, and traditional garments. Its narrow alleyways are adorned with arches and interwoven colours, while its coppersmiths excel in the craft of producing vessels and decorative objects. The beaches of Monastir host various sports, such as sailing, diving, and beach volleyball. The city also boasts two golf courses of exceptional beauty and international standards. In addition, Monastir contains a conference palace with numerous halls capable of accommodating major international conventions.

- **Mahdia:**

Mahdia, the first capital of the Fatimids, is notable for its strategic location and fortified walls. Its most famous landmarks include the following:

Mahdia Tower: formerly housing the city's garrison, it now serves as a marketplace for silk, jewellery, and textiles.

The Great Mosque: regarded as the first mosque of distinct religious architectural design in the history of Islamic art. Many mosques of the Fatimid state, including al-Azhar Mosque, were modelled on its plan.

Old port: a remarkable architectural achievement of the Fatimid state.

Water reservoirs: vast cisterns located in the square of the palace of the Caliph al-Qā'im bi-Amr Allāh al-Fāṭimī, considered among the most renowned monuments of Islamic civilisation. Mahdia is further distinguished by its traditional costumes, including women's jewellery and richly decorated silk textiles embroidered with golden and silver threads. The city's hotels, built along its seafront, often reflect an Arab-Andalusian architectural style, adding to its unique cultural character.

- **Kairouan:**

The capital of the Aghlabids, Kairouan, is characterised by its winding alleyways and white-domed rooftops, making it a veritable Islamic open-air museum. Its most significant monument is the Great Mosque of 'Uqba ibn Nāfi', founded in 670 CE by the esteemed Companion of the Prophet. It is one of the oldest and most prestigious mosques in the Islamic world and the very first in the Maghreb. The city also hosts the Raqqada Museum, which contains a substantial collection of ceramics, bronzes, and carved wood. Kairouan is renowned for its abundance of mosques, shrines of saints, and religious lodges scattered throughout the city. Among the most notable are the Zāwiya of Sidi 'Ubayd al-Ghiryānī and the mausoleum of Sidi Sahbi. The city is recognised equally for its traditional crafts, such as engraved copperware, embroidered saddles, and handmade footwear, as well as for its celebrated confectioneries.

- **Sbeitla - Kasserine:**

Located in the western-central part of Tunisia, the cities of Sbeitla and Kasserine are set amidst dense forests and high mountains, including Jebel Chaambi, the highest peak in Tunisia at approximately 1,544 metres. The region is marked by vast expanses of *alfa grass* and is known for its traditional industries, such as tent-making and garments woven from sheep wool and goat hair.

Sbeitla was one of the great cities of the Roman era, and today, it preserves numerous ruins from that period. Among the most notable examples are the Forum, with its impressive arch and large worship square; the Capitol, a yellow-stone structure composed of three adjacent temples; and Roman baths and a theatre. Kasserine, whose name derives from the presence of two ancient mausoleas left by Byzantine civilisation, lies approximately 198 kilometres from Tunis. It is home to the largest Byzantine fortress in the Maghreb region. The broader area contains several historically rich towns, such as Kef, which houses the Ottoman fortress known as the Kasbah, along with the Roman city of Sicca Veneria, constructed in honour of the goddess Venus. Kef is also the site of the religious lodge of the revered saint Sidi Abi Makhoul.

- **Djerba – Zarzis:**

The island of Djerba is one of Tunisia's most important tourist destinations; it is equipped with an international airport and renowned for its splendid beaches of fine white sand and unique architectural style, featuring white domes and cubic houses. What distinguishes Djerba from other Tunisian regions is the presence of a Jewish community living side by side with Muslims. The most notable Jewish quarters are *Hara Kebira* and *Hara Sghira*, making the island a destination for Jews of North African origin. Among its historical landmarks is the Borj el-Kebir fortress, dating back to the fifteenth century. Djerba is equally known for its traditional industries, including pottery, weaving, palm-leaf crafts, and olive pressing. Furthermore, it has a long tradition of goldsmithing. The island also boasts luxury Andalusian-style hotels, thalassotherapy centres, and a range of sports activities, such as horse riding, diving, and golf.

- **Sfax – Kerkennah Islands:**

Sfax is considered the gateway to southern Tunisia. It is notable for its vast olive groves and impressive architecture in the Islamic style. Its Medina is filled with spice and perfume shops, at the center of which stands the Great Mosque, dating back to the twelfth century. The city also hosts the Dar Jellouli Museum of Arts and Popular Traditions, which preserves numerous artefacts and crystal objects. The Kerkennah Islands, meanwhile, are distinguished by their archaeological remains, the most significant of which are the ruins of ancient cities associated with the Carthaginian general Hannibal during his journey eastwards.

- **The Oases:**

The Tunisian oases encompass several towns, the most prominent being Gabès, Gafsa, Tozeur, and Nefta, which serve as a transition between the north and the south of the country. These regions are characterised by vast palm groves interspersed with the domed mausolea of revered saints. Oases are also known for traditional crafts that rely on palm products, such as basketry and mat weaving. What makes them particularly unique are mountain oases, such as Tamerza and Midès, where palm groves flourish amidst barren mountains. These cities also offer luxury hotels built in an Islamic architectural style, along with wildlife parks that display desert animals such as gazelles and fennecs. In terms of transport, Tozeur is served by an international airport. The oases are additionally popular for recreational activities, including motorcycling and sailing land yachts across the Chott el-Jerid.

- **Southern Tunisia:**

Southern Tunisia is distinguished by its golden sands, salt desert, Chott el-Jerid, and unique rocky desert landscapes. The Tunisian Sahara also preserves significant archaeological landmarks, such as Qasr Ghilane, and is renowned as one of the filming locations for the *Star Wars* saga. The desert contains more than 150 *ksour* (fortified granaries), some of which have been converted into hotels, such as the Ksar Haddada, which now serves as accommodations attracting foreign tourists.

Recreational activities in deserts include motorcycle racing, sandboarding, and hot-air ballooning. The most important city in Tunisian Sahara is Douz, a traditional meeting point for nomadic tribes. Douz is notable for its traditional crafts, such as berber jewellery and woollen products. The city is especially famous for hosting the International Festival of the Sahara, which features poetry contests, horse and camel races, and a celebration of desert art.

Another prominent city in southern Tunisia is Tataouine, often referred to as an open-air archaeological museum, with desert sites such as Ain ed-Douk, Douiret, and Ghomrassen showcasing remarkable remains of Tunisia's heritage.

Third Axis: Role of Recreational Sports Activities in Supporting the Tourism Sector

The Tunisian state has made the development of Saharan tourism one of the most important priorities for strengthening the tourism sector as a whole. This orientation stems from its awareness of the significant role that

such tourism plays in generating foreign currency and creating employment opportunities, particularly during the winter season, when coastal tourism experiences a marked decline. Consequently, Tunisia has invested in promoting its southern regions, turning them into a tourism market capable of attracting foreign visitors. It has introduced products that have transformed these areas into popular destinations.

Among the most notable of these products are international festivals, a relatively new form of tourism in which travellers move specifically to attend cultural or artistic events. Festival tourism is well established in countries such as France, which hosts approximately 3,500 festivals; Spain, with approximately 8,104 festivals; and Germany, with approximately 5,000 festivals. Tourism festivals constitute promotional activities, events, and cultural programs organised within a specific time frame. They serve as revitalising tools employed by tourism companies and states to stimulate demand during the off-season.⁵

These festivals include a variety of recreational and cultural activities, as well as traditional games, which provide tourists with enjoyable experiences throughout the event. Among the most significant of these is the International Festival of the Sahara in Douz, which is regarded not only as Tunisia's most important desert festival but also as one of the most renowned worldwide. Established in 1910, it was the oldest festival in Tunisia and acquired international status in 1981.⁶ The festival features a wide array of recreational activities and traditional games, the most prominent of which are as follows:

1. Camel Racing:

Camel racing is one of the most important activities held during Tunisian festivals. Numerous camels compete in these races, covering distances exceeding forty kilometres.⁷ Many countries, particularly Arab states, participate in such events. Tourists are also able to ride Tunisian camels on these occasions, making the experience both participatory and culturally immersive.

2. Horse Racing:

Horse racing is likewise among the most prominent recreational competitions organised at many Tunisian festivals, attracting numerous participants from different countries. Although the prizes awarded may not match those of international competitions, these races remain central attractions closely followed by tourists. Horse riding itself is a favourite sport for many foreign visitors, not only in southern Tunisia but also throughout the country as a whole.

3. Sandboarding:

Sandboarding is a sport practised on boards similar to those used in snowboarding, although it is performed on dunes rather than snowy mountains. It enjoys a following worldwide, particularly in desert regions and coastal areas with extensive dunes. Participants typically descend the slopes of dunes with their feet strapped to the boards, although some prefer unstrapped boards.⁸ Despite its resemblance to snowboarding, sandboarding is less widespread, mainly due to the logistical difficulty of constructing lifts on dunes. As a result, participants usually climb the dunes on foot or rely on off-road vehicles and sand bikes for ascent. Unlike snowboarding, which is restricted to specific seasons of the year, sandboarding can be practised year-round. It is also a relatively inexpensive sport and highly popular among tourists, factors that have contributed to its wide diffusion across southern Tunisia.

4. The Game of El-Ma'qāf (Palm-Stick Ball)

El-Ma'qāf is a distinctive traditional sport that was widely practised in the southern Maghreb earlier. Tunisian festivals have revived this heritage game by incorporating competitive matches into most desert festivals. It is a team sport played with a ball made of palm fibre, rope, or plastic materials and resembles football in its dynamics, except that it is played using sticks fashioned from palm fronds or olive wood. Two teams, composed of men, women, or mixed groups, compete by striking and directing the ball across the playing field. The game requires considerable stamina, agility, and the ability to track the ball's movements in all directions.⁹

5. Hunting with the Sloughi

Hunting with the Sloughi is one of the most popular recreational activities, attracting large audiences at Tunisian festivals. Sloughi, a breed of dog renowned for its remarkable speed, has traditionally been used in desert regions for herding and for hunting gazelles and hares. In these competitions, participants who own Sloughi dogs release them in pursuit of a hare set free across a vast expanse. The winner is the owner of the dog that successfully captures the hare.

6. The Game of Kharbga

Kharbga is a traditional game widely known across the desert regions of the Maghreb, bearing strong similarities to chess. The principal distinction lies in the playing field: whereas chess is played on a board, Kharbga is played directly on the ground. Players dig a set number of holes in the soil and, in turn, place stones into their respective positions. Once all the stones have been placed, the game begins, with each participant seeking to outmanoeuvre the other. Kharbga is played throughout the desert regions of Tunisia and draws enthusiasts, particularly from neighbouring Algeria and Libya.¹⁰

Conclusion

The Tunisian state has long recognised the importance of the tourism sector, which has led it to prioritise tourism as one of its principal economic pillars. This attention stems not only from the sector's role in generating foreign currency and creating employment opportunities but also, more importantly, from its contribution to the development of remote regions, particularly southern Tunisia. By establishing festivals and exhibitions, the state has succeeded in creating tourism products that require limited financial investment while attracting large numbers of tourists and investors in the tourism industry.

From the foregoing, it is evident that Tunisia has successfully broken the isolation of its desert regions, created employment opportunities for its citizens within the tourism sector, and ensured the continuity of desert festivals, transforming them into a meeting point for enthusiasts of recreational activities and traditional sports.

To draw lessons from the Tunisian experience for the development of the tourism sector in Algeria in general and Saharan tourism in particular, the following recommendations are proposed as essential measures for supporting the Algerian tourism sector:

Recommendations

1. The creation of numerous festivals plays a crucial role in supporting the tourism sector.
2. Raising awareness among the Algerian population regarding the importance of festivals in developing tourism.
3. Conducting rigorous feasibility studies on the economic impact of festivals before large budgets are allocated, as is currently the case in Algeria, without yielding significant returns.
4. Ensuring continuous coordination between the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Tourism in the preparation of festivals.
5. Drawing on the Tunisian experience in designing festivals that integrate cultural and sporting events.
6. Traditional sports, which constitute highly demanded tourism products among foreign visitors, should be promoted.
7. Ensuring the fair distribution of budgets for festivals and cultural activities across the national territory rather than limiting them to the northern regions.
8. Organising scientific symposia and study days for the managers of these festivals and entrusting festival management to individuals with proven competence and expertise.

9. Adequate infrastructure should be provided to accommodate tourists, particularly in desert regions.
10. Seeking to internationalise successful Algerian festivals by undertaking large-scale promotional campaigns abroad.

Conflict of interest. Author declare that there is no any conflict of interest in his article.

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Endnotes

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3. ³ Yusrī Da‘bas, op. cit., 247.
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8. ⁸ Wikipedia, “*Al-Tazalluj ‘alā al-Rimāl* [Sandboarding],” Arabic Wikipedia, accessed 20 October 2014, http://ar.wikipedia.org/wiki/التزلُّج_على_الرَّمال
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10. ¹⁰ “*Mawqi‘ al-Thaqāfa al-Sha‘biyya al-Tūnisiyya*” [The Tunisian Popular Culture Website], accessed 25 October 2014, <http://www.folkculturebh.org/ar/index.php?issue=24&page=showarticle&id=453>