



## Ancient & Islamic Tunisia

Carthaginian, Roman and Arabian North Africa

2–9 November 2024 (MK 555)

8 days • £3,110

Lecturer: Dr Zena Kamash

Exceptionally preserved Punic and Roman remains; some of the best in North Africa.

Varied and striking landscapes; less-visited sites.

Outstanding Roman mosaics throughout, both in museums and on archaeological sites.

Important Islamic sites of Kairouan, Tunis and Testour.

Some of the most spectacular of ancient Roman sites anywhere are to be found in the magnificent landscapes of Tunisia, where less than a fifth of estimated ancient remains have officially been unearthed. The Roman province of Africa, of which Tunisia was the heart, was one of the wealthiest regions of the Empire. Known as the bread basket of Rome, for its wheat production, its olive oil was also exported in vast quantities across the Empire.

A condition for optimum preservation was the abandonment of the cities by non-urban successor civilisations. The consequences are impressive: among the Roman world's best-preserved monuments are the colosseum at El Djem, the theatre at Dougga and parts of the Zaghouan–Carthage aqueduct. Aside from Roman history, Tunisia's Carthaginian ruins are exceptional.

A highlight of the tour are the vigorous, colourful and naturalistic floor mosaics at the Sousse and Bardo museums and *in situ* on many of the sites. Both in composition and content they present a visual record of the sophistication of the North African region from the early Christian era to the seventh century. The finest to have been excavated from Carthage, Utica, Dougga and Sousse, are displayed as works of art.

What we see of Tunisia's impressive Islamic heritage includes the important holy city of Kairouan, the wonderfully busy Medina of Tunis, and other less-visited towns, including Testour, a charming agricultural village with Andalusian roots and an exceptional mosque.



Amphitheatre, El Djem, wood engraving c. 1880.

### Itinerary

**Day 1: Tunis.** Fly from London Heathrow at c. 5.00pm with Tunisair to Tunis. First of three nights here.

**Day 2: Tunis, Carthage.** A former palace, the Bardo Museum accommodates the finest repository of Roman mosaics in the world. The afternoon is spent visiting the principal sites of Carthage, the capital of the Punic (or Carthaginian) world and later the second city in the western Roman Empire after Rome. Overnight Tunis.

**Day 3: Dougga, Testour.** Drive west for a full-day excursion to the superb site of Dougga, UNESCO World-Heritage-listed, and one of the best-preserved Roman cities in North Africa. It is also interesting for the way the grand Roman buildings have evidently been added to a pre-Roman city plan with no regular street layout. Remains include Roman temples, baths, a theatre and a circus, a spectacular 2nd-century BC tomb monument and a Byzantine (6th-century AD) fortification that surrounds the Roman forum. About 25 km from Dougga, Testour, founded in the 17th century by Andalusian immigrants, has a unique mosque. Final night in Tunis.

**Day 4: Oudna (Uthina), Thuburbo Majus, Zaghouan, Kairouan.** Visit the Roman site of Uthina, a chance to see several good quality mosaics *in situ*. The amphitheatre has underground vaulted cells intact. Thuburbo Majus is a major Roman city, with

a colonnaded forum, fine temples, houses and baths and, by contrast with Dougga, streets laid out on a rectilinear grid. At 51 km long, the Zaghouan–Carthage aqueduct was one of the longest in the Roman world and its remains are breathtaking. Its source at Zaghouan was beautifully embellished with a water temple, set in a courtyard in a hillside terrace. First of two nights in Kairouan.

**Day 5: Kairouan, El Djem.** The morning is spent in Kairouan, with visits to the Medina and the Great Mosque (8th/9th century) and other examples of local traditional architecture. The immense colosseum at El Djem could hold 30,000 and is a remarkable sight, towering over its modern surroundings. The small museum nearby contains some exquisite mosaics. Final night in Kairouan.

**Day 6: Sousse, Sidi Bou Said.** Founded in the 9th century BC, Sousse fell to Carthage three centuries later. Hannibal's base during the Second Punic War, it subsequently took on a Roman allegiance. In the 7th century AD it fell to the Arabs. Visit the archaeological museum located within the Kasbah of the old city, which is renowned for its mosaic collection. Continue to Sidi Bou Said for some free time. First of two nights.

**Day 7: Tunis.** The Medina, the vibrant old town, is a maze of alleys crammed with ancient buildings, covered markets and beautiful doorways. At its heart lies the Great Mosque of 9th-century AD origin, one of North Africa's most significant Islamic buildings. The rest of

Ancient & Islamic Tunisia  
continued

the day is free for wandering the Medina or relaxing at the hotel. In the evening a private visit to the Ennejma Ezzahra (Splendid Star), built by master craftspeople in the 1900s as a home for the Baron Rodolphe d'Erlanger, in homage to his passion for the Middle East. It is now a museum and the Centre for Arab and Mediterranean Music. Final night in Sidi Bou Said.

**Day 8.** Fly from Tunis to London Heathrow with Tunisair, arriving c. 5.00pm.

## Lecturer

**Dr Zena Kamash.** Senior Lecturer in Roman Archaeology and Art at Royal Holloway, University of London and a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries. An expert in the heritage and archaeology of the Roman world, in particular the Middle East, Britain and North Africa, she has published widely on a range of topics including water technologies, religion, food, memory and post-conflict reconstruction. She is currently leading a British Academy-funded project on 'Crafting Heritage for Wellbeing in Iraq', which builds on her previous project, 'Remembering the Romans in the Middle East and North Africa'. Her next book, *Heritage and Healing in Syria and Iraq*, explores alternative, creative approaches to heritage in conflict zones, and will be published by Manchester University Press.

## Practicalities

**Price, per person. Two sharing:** £3,110 or £2,810 without flights. **Single occupancy:** £3,470 or £3,170 without flights.

**Included:** air travel (economy class) with Tunisair; (Airbus A320); travel by private coach and boat; accommodation as below; breakfasts, 6 lunches and 6 dinners with wine, water, coffee (not all restaurants serve alcohol and none is served at the picnic); all admissions; all tips; all taxes; the services of the lecturer, a tour manager and a Tunisian guide.

**Visas:** British, US and Australian citizens do not require a visa to visit Tunisia. New Zealand passport holders are required to apply in advance for a tourist visa.

**Accommodation. Sheraton, Tunis** (sheratontunis.com): a business hotel located between the city centre and airport. Rooms enjoy a view overlooking Tunis. **Hotel la Kasbah, Kairouan** (goldenyasmin.com): excellently located in the heart of the old town. Rooms are simple, but clean and comfortable. The best available accommodation. In the areas away from the main tourist resorts, standards are not as high as in the more developed coastal towns and the capital. **Dar Said, Sidi Bou Said** (darsaid.com.tn) and/or **La Villa Bleue** (www.lavillableuesidibousaid.com): two boutique hotels perched on the hills of the tranquil town of Sidi Bou Said with excellent views. *Single rooms are doubles for sole use throughout.*

**How strenuous?** This tour covers some long distances, involving a lot of travel by coach. There is quite a lot of walking or scrambling over the rough terrain of archaeological sites. Many of the sites are exposed with no protection from the sun or shelter from rain or wind. Average distance by coach per day: 85 miles.

**Group size:** between 10 and 22 participants.