

Tunisia Tourism

The tourism ministry reported a 15.5 per cent increase in tourist visitors during the first half of 2001, including a 12 per cent rise in British tourists. The increase brought in an estimated \$750 million in revenues. Tourism has been the main single source of hard currency since the early 1990s and accounted for 6 per cent of GDP in 2000.

The country possesses many and varied attractions for foreign visitors and the well established tourism industry retains significant growth potential. A slowing down in the rate of expansion last year appears to have been merely temporary and has so far been reversed in 2001 at least in terms of visitor numbers; the total January-May visitors rose to 1.5 million as against 1.3 million in 2000. Under the 10th Plan, tourism is expected to achieve a growth rate of six per cent and thus contribute to ensuring a 5.8 per cent GDP.

The ministry feels that this is achievable due primarily to the quality and diversity of Tunisia's tourist attractions, cultural, sporting, climate and the Saharan oases. Golf is a significant feature of tourism with many new 18 hole golf courses being constructed at beautiful locations along the coastline or on top of the sand dunes. Potential for tourist expansion in addition lies in the possibility of attracting more visitors from neighbouring Arab states and encouraging domestic tourists to spend more of their leisure time at home. Tunisia aims to get away from its image as a cheap package tour destination and has sought to develop higher quality products based variously on sports such as golf, culturally based tours; even the new fashionable area of "ecotourism". However, the government has recognised that there is a noticeable level of underinvestment in facilities particularly services such as hotels, restaurants and nightspots and has devised a strategy to address the problem, which includes a significant number of construction projects.

Despite the record of success, Tunisia still faces many economic challenges, not least of which is job creation to provide opportunities for the people, as well as maintaining the privatisation drive, modernising its service industries and overhauling the financial sector. British businesses, investors and service providers are now in a good position to realise the opportunities and build new partnerships with Tunisia.