

Information
about

TUNISIA



Learning About Tunisia

is a symbol of our resistance against outside forces. The disc in the middle stands for the sun. The red crescent and star are symbols of Islam and are considered lucky ones. Our coat of arms is another national symbol. It is in the shape of a shield. On the shield is a ship, a lion, and a set of scales. The ship stands for freedom, the lion for order, and the scales for the balance of justice.

Tunisia's national dish is called couscous. Couscous is made up of round bead-like pieces of rolled, wet semolina wheat that are coated with finely-ground wheat flour. It is often served with different meat dishes. Our national sport is soccer or football. It is played on large soccer fields and on the streets in many towns and cities.

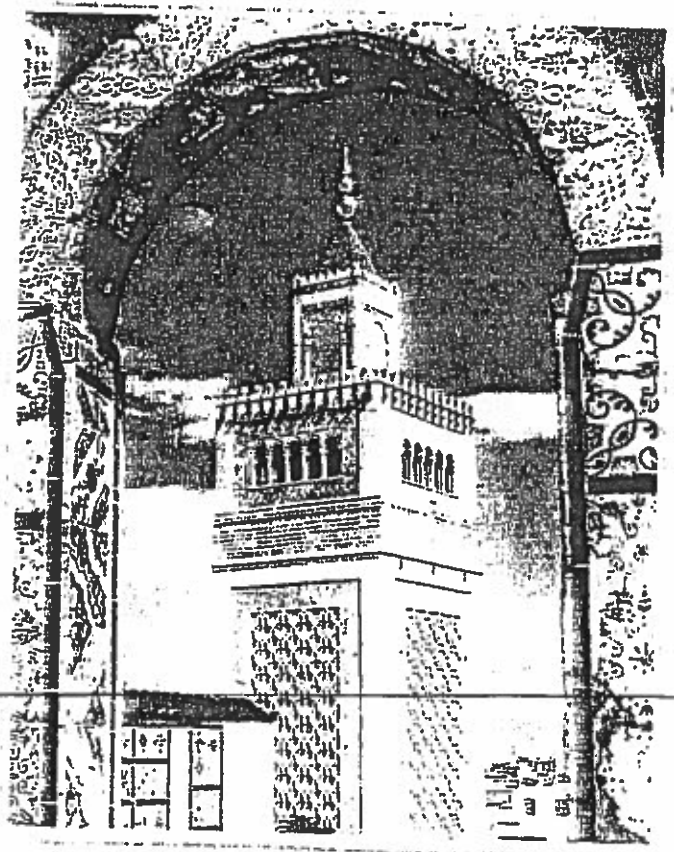
The population of Tunisia is around ten million people. Most of the people live in or close to cities. Others live on farms and in rural communities. The main language spoken is Arabic and French is used for doing business.

Our capital city is Tunis. It is found near the Gulf of Tunis. It sits on the shores of a lake that joins it to the Mediterranean Sea.

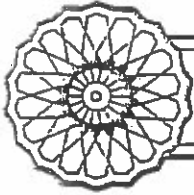
You will find my country very different and very interesting!



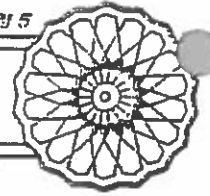
The market after closing time in downtown Tunis



A mosque tower in Tunis



Tunisia the Land



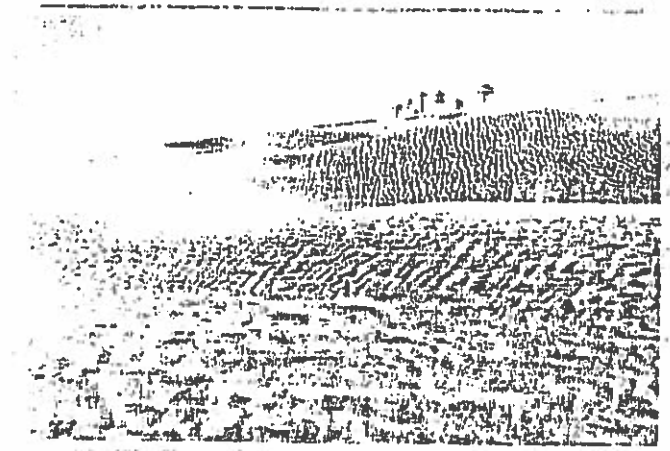
Inland from the coast in the central part of Tunisia is a humid coastal plain and low hills. This area of Tunisia is called the Sahel. This is a very important region and is home to nearly half of the people in Tunisia. This area is very old and goes back to the days of the Roman Empire. The Sahel contains ancient villages and olive, pomegranate, and almond orchards.

Off the coast from the city of Sfax are the Kerkennah Islands. These islands are covered with palm trees and vineyards surrounded by quiet lagoons. It is a tourist paradise.

In central Tunisia lies a wide, flat plateau. It is divided into sections called the High Steppe and the Low Steppe. This plateau is dry and hot and receives little rain. Only a few plants and scrub bushes can grow. At one time nomadic herders used the grass that grew on the plateau to feed their animals. Today there is no grass as the Sahara desert has slowly moved northward. There are very few towns or cities in this area.

South of the central plateau Tunisia is very barren. Its climate is hotter and drier. During the winter, rain falls and fills low areas creating shallow, salt water lakes which dry up during the summer months. Further

south the land becomes part of the Sahara Desert.



The Sahara Desert

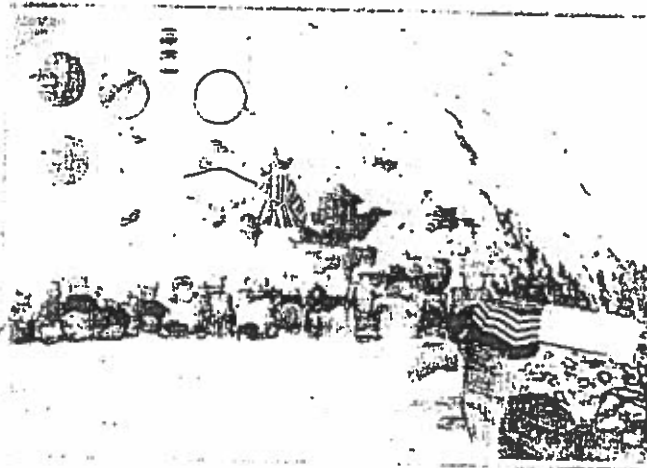
Some areas of the desert do not receive any rain for years. Nothing grows in the desert except in oases, which are fertile areas that get water from underground springs. The people who live in an oasis community depend a great deal on their date palm trees.



A Tunisian palm oasis

Living in Tunisia

In southern Tunisia, Berbers build dwellings carved out of rock. Matmâta is a cave village located on the slope of a hill. Berber people have been digging their homes out of the ground for more than a thousand years in Matmâta. In this village there are 100 underground homes and even an underground hotel.



Inside a cave house in Matmâta, Tunisia

Underground homes are very useful places in hot dry climates. Under the ground, the temperature is always the same. At night, when the desert gets cold, the cave stays warm and comfortable. During the day when the sun is extremely hot, the caves are cool.

Cave homes are built around artificial craters that are 5 to 10 meters (16-32 feet) deep with doors and windows in the steep walls towards the crater. The crater looks like a patio and the lower part of the wall is often painted white. Sometimes craters are connected by

various tunnels. Most of the houses are a single crater with several rooms used for living, sleeping or storing food. The interior of the cave home is usually whitewashed. A sloping tunnel leads into the underground home or a ladder is used which can be removed in time of danger.

Most of Tunisia's cities are ancient and have been built by many different cultures. In Tunisia's cities luxury homes and apartment buildings are lived in by the rich and middle-class Tunisians. The front doors of houses open directly on to the street. There are no front yards and very few windows. Most single family homes are small. Many houses are two to three storeys high. The houses have flat roofs that are used as outdoor living space.



Sousse, a city in Tunisia

Tunisian Etiquette

(how to behave)



Tunisians are polite, respectful people. We always use our best manners when we are with family and friends.

Read about the ways in which we use our good manners.

Did you know that:

- Tunisians always treat people with respect while talking to them.
- Tunisians always show interest in another person's family during a greeting.
- Tunisian men always shake hands with each other when they meet.
- A Tunisian man will not shake the hand of a woman if she doesn't extend her hand first.
- Tunisian men will kiss each other on the cheeks if they haven't seen each other for a long time.
- Tunisian men and women never kiss one another in public.
- Tunisian men eat and shake hands with their right hand.
- Tunisian men must show respect for each other.
- Tunisian men do not smoke in front of their fathers.
- Tunisians bring gifts of nuts, fruits, candy, or flowers when visiting someone's home.
- Tunisians always remove their shoes before entering a house.
- Tunisian women often cover their head and body with a cloth called a "safsari".
- A Tunisian man is not to carry his child in front of his father.
- Tunisian women only leave the house to go to places that are approved by her family.
- Young Tunisian men and women do not date until they are ready for marriage.
- Tunisian men do not visit each other in their homes because the women would be present.

Farming in Tunisia

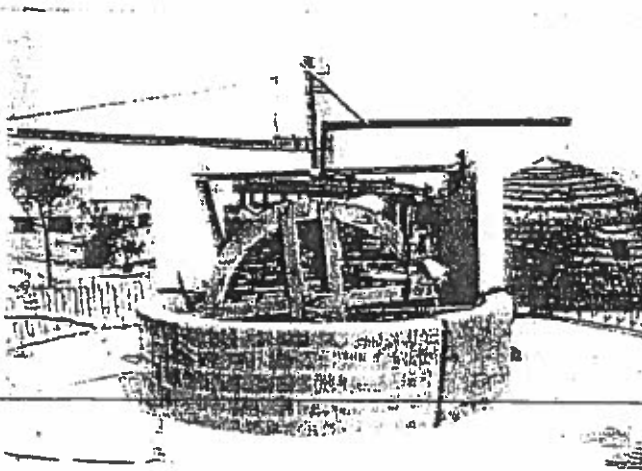


Farming in Tunisia has always been a very important industry. People need food in order to live.

Read the information and find out how we farm in Tunisia.

In Tunisia, farming is an important way of life. Many farmers raise animals or grow crops on small rented or family-owned farms. The farmers on small farms do most of the work by hand and use animals to pull plows to cultivate the land. Old-fashioned methods are used for most things. In some areas, farmers work on government-owned land and use machinery and modern methods.

In many farming areas, the people live in flat-roofed houses with thick adobe walls to keep out the intense heat. In mountain areas, homes are made of stucco or stone. The homes are simply furnished and do not have running water or telephones.



This Tunisian well uses animal power to lift water out of the ground



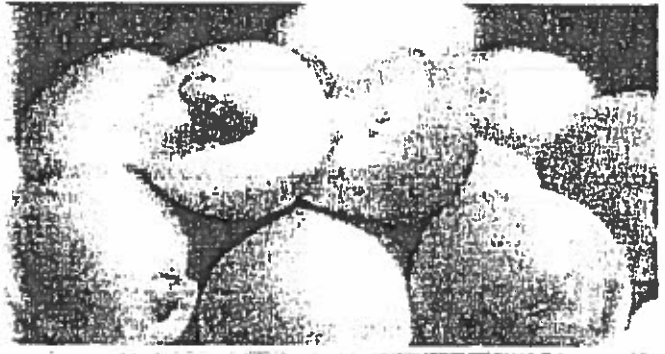
A rural village

The Date Palm Tree

A date palm grows as tall as 30 meters (100 feet). Its trunk is straight and rough and its base and top are the same thickness. Feather-like leaves that are 3 to 6 meters (10 to 20 feet) long fan out from the top of the trunk. Date palm trees usually grow in clumps.

Dates grow in clusters at the end of stalks. One cluster may hold 600 to 1,700 dates at the time of picking. Date palms produce a lot of fruit. One tree can grow 45 kilograms (100 pounds) of fruit each year for 60 years.

Between February and June flowers bloom on the trees. The fruit ripens from June to December. The date is an oblong fruit that measures 2.5 centimeters to 5 centimeters (1 to 2 inches) in length. The date has thick, sweet flesh that is covered by tough skin and inside the date is a single, large seed. Dates may be yellow to orange, red, or green in color depending on the kind.



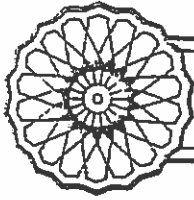
Fresh dates

Date palms require warm temperatures and dry air to ripen properly. The roots need a regular supply of water that may be supplied by irrigation or an underground spring. Workers harvest the clusters of dates by hand. The dates are sprayed to kill the insects and then placed in a warm place to ripen more and to dry.

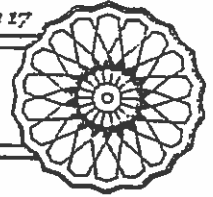


Dried dates

The goods that
they produce

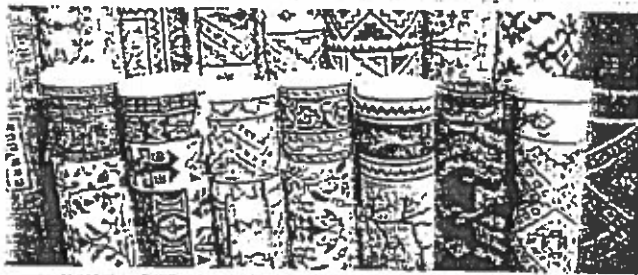


Industry in Tunisia



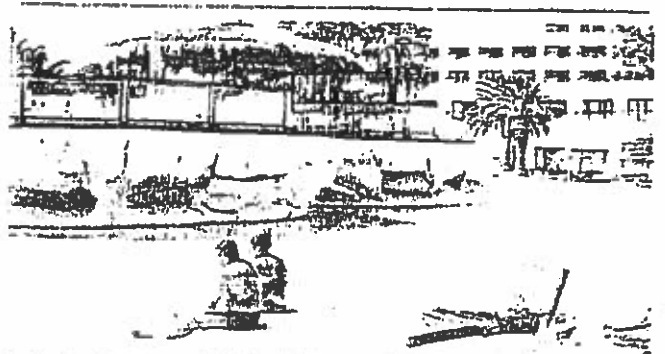
~~wages~~ This has led many European clothing companies to choose Tunisia's factories to make their clothing.

For many years, Tunisians have been known for their handicrafts. These crafts are made in small workshops for the local markets called "souks" and for tourists. These workshops usually employ about 10 workers including the owner. The workers make clothing, rugs, pottery, copper and leather goods, jewelry, and embroidered articles. These handicrafts are exported to other countries or sold to the tourists. The city of Kairouan is famous for its carpets.



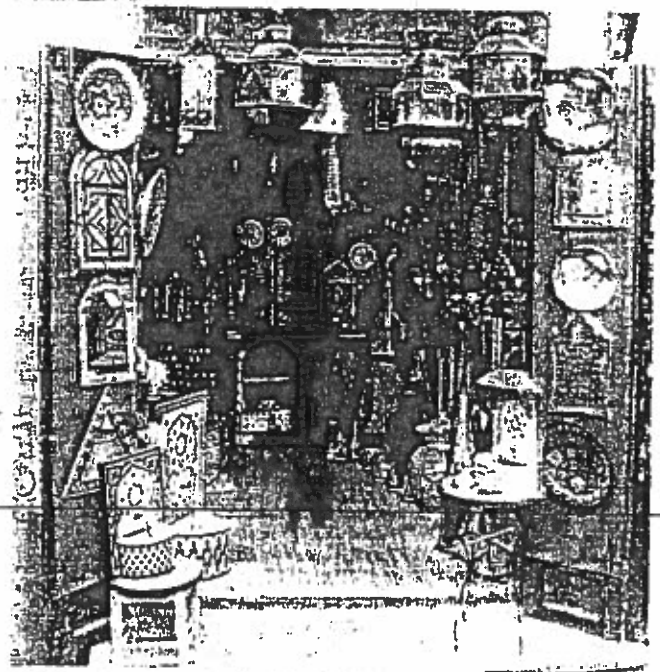
Tunisian carpets

The tourist industry is steadily growing and this helps Tunisia's economy in many ways. Major tourist attractions such as the beautiful beaches along the east coast, Jerba Island, the oases in the Tunisian Sahara Desert, and the many ruins of old cities attract people from all over the world.



A Tunisian hotel

Throughout the country of Tunisia and in the many cities and towns are weekly markets that provide goods for the people to buy. Food, clothing, household goods, and animals are sold at markets called "souks". Many poor people are street vendors who sell goods that they make on the streets and roads.



A handcraft shop in a souk

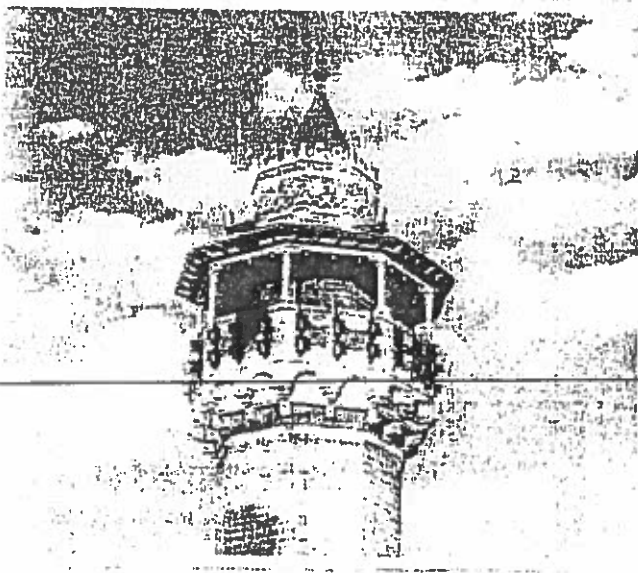
Religion in Tunisia



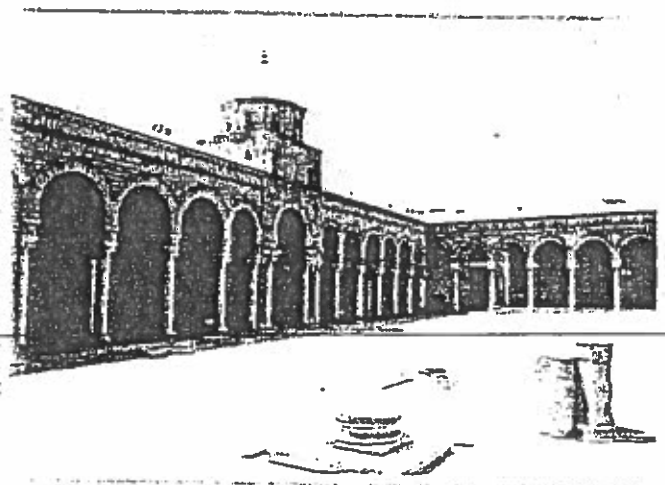
I am a Muslim and I go to a mosque with my parents every Friday. Our mosque is a big building in the center of a courtyard.

A mosque is a place used for worship and a meeting place, and is a place where scholars study Islam. Most mosques have beautiful domes, minarets, and prayer halls with colorful carpets on the floors. In some countries, a muezzin climbs the minaret to call the faithful to pray five times a day. In Tunisia today, the call to prayer is broadcast on radio and television.

Friday is the Muslim holy day and no one goes to work. The community meets at the mosque to pray. When entering the mosque everyone takes off their shoes and leaves them outside the prayer hall. Upon entering the mosque, a Muslim will use the right foot first while giving blessings to Muhammad and his family. People speak softly in a mosque so not to disturb people who are praying.



The minaret of the old mosque in Tunis



The great mosque in Kairouan, Tunisia

Tunisian Fashions



Tunisian people dress in many different ways. Some wear modern western fashions while others still dress in traditional ways.



Traditional Berber clothing

Clothing worn in Muslim countries depends on the climate, traditions, religion, and social levels. People who live in a warmer climate usually wear loose clothing to protect themselves from the sun and to keep cool. Their clothes are usually white or light colors because they are cooler. Dark colors such as black attracts the heat. Clothes are made out of cotton. When it

is cooler, woollen clothing is worn. Head coverings are worn to protect their heads from the sun.

Traditions in each community affect the style of clothing worn. Married and single women do not dress the same or wear the same head covering. The clothing women wear outside the home is not the same as what is worn inside the home. Clothing used for working on farms is different from clothing worn to the mosque.

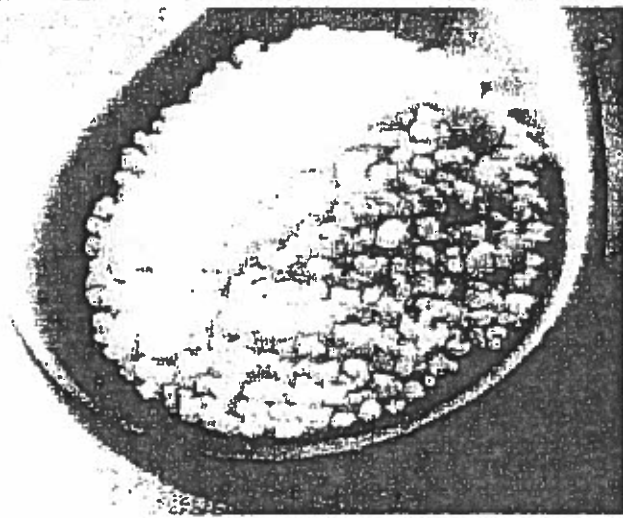
The clothing that Muslims wear is also dictated by the teachings of the Qur'an. Muslim clothing should not attract attention or show off any parts of the body.

The only parts that can be shown are the hands and the face. Women are to cover their heads with a "hijab" especially when they enter a mosque. The material used to

The Food of Tunisia



Tunisians love to eat hot and spicy foods. Our national dish is called "couscous". It is eaten at nearly every one of our meals.



Raw couscous

Couscous is like tiny pasta. It is made from semolina wheat sprinkled with oil and water and rolled into grains. Couscous is cooked in a pot called a *couscoussiere*. Couscous is put in the top of the pot and is cooked by the steam from the meat and vegetables cooking in the bottom of the pot. When everything is cooked the meat, vegetables, and juices are poured over the couscous on a big serving dish.

Tunisians also cook different stews in a pot with a cone-shaped lid called a "tagine". The word "tagine" is also used for the dish cooked in this pot. Tagine

makes use of many different kinds of meat, vegetables, and fruits.

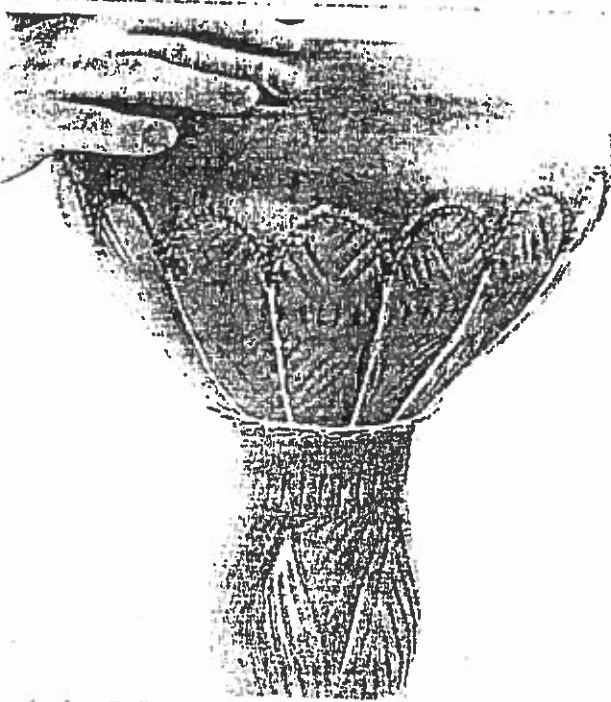
Tunisians also like to eat a salad made of tomatoes, onions, peppers, and hardboiled eggs. A soup called "shorba" is made with meat or fish and is usually a meal all by itself. "Kebabs" are made from pieces of lamb, beef, chicken, or fish that are put on long sticks called skewers and broiled or grilled over coals. A spicy, hot sauce called "harissa" made from hot peppers, salt, and garlic is often added to Tunisian dishes.

A popular fast food is "egg brik". It is made of thin pastry with egg, chopped parsley, and capers inside. The pastry is deep fried until the egg is cooked and the pastry is crispy.

For dessert, Tunisians love to eat sweet pastries stuffed with nuts and dates that have been soaked in honey as well as fruits that are in season. They also enjoy drinking strong Turkish coffee and sweet mint tea in glasses.

Since most Tunisians are Muslims, they do not eat pork nor drink alcohol as they are forbidden by their religion.

Tunisian Music and Dance

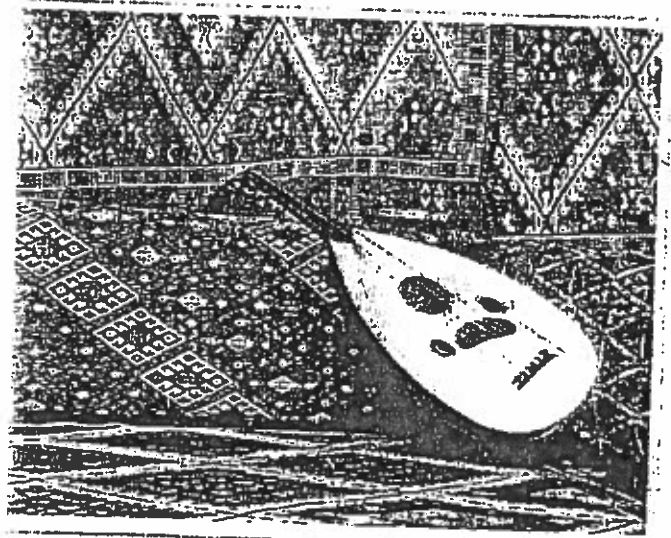


A darbuka is a traditional Arabic drum

Arabic traditional music is not written but is passed down in an apprentice system where the teacher shows the student. Musicians learn to play music "by ear" and by listening to others.

"Malouf" is a kind of Spanish music that is played and listened to in Tunisia as well. It is performed with musical instruments such as violins, drums, lutes, and sitars.

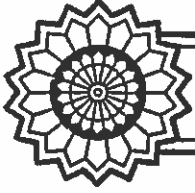
A sitar is an Indian musical instrument. Malouf is very rhythmic music that is often performed at weddings and other special ceremonies.



A lute

Dancing in a Muslim country is viewed differently than in other countries. Some Muslims feel dance should not be done at all. They feel dancing is sinful. Other Muslims feel folk dancing just between men and just between women is fine. Men and women are not to dance with each other.

Many folk dances are done with separate groups of men and women but not mixed. These dances celebrate famous warriors, the planting seasons, the harvest, and the changes in the seasons. Some dances celebrate special times in a person's life such as weddings and births.



Tunisia's Culture

- A. The following information has been provided for the teacher for support during lessons and discussions on the various aspects of Tunisian culture. The information deals with religion, clothing, food, holidays and celebrations, and arts and crafts.
- B. Worksheets accompany each aspect of Tunisian culture and may be used as follow-ups to lessons.

Tunisian Language and Education:

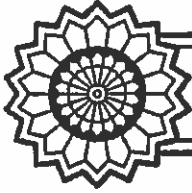
Tunisia's official language is Arabic and many of its dialects are spoken around the country. The Muslim holy book called the Qur'an is written in classical Arabic. The language used by the government is a form of classical Arabic called modern literary Arabic. French is also spoken and is used during business. English is used with foreign investors and with tourists. A small percentage of the population who are Berber speak "Chelha", which is the Berber language.

The government of Tunisia feels it is very important that everyone in Tunisia has the right to go to school. It is one of the government's top priorities. Before Tunisia's independence only a few people received any education. Many Tunisian parents had to be persuaded that education is important for their children and for the growth of the country. In the poorer, more traditional and agricultural areas, education does not always seem important. Parents feel children are more useful at home looking after flocks of sheep or helping out on the land.

By law, children in Tunisia must attend school between the ages of six to 16. Preschool is offered to children from the ages of three to six but this is optional and parents must agree to pay the fee. Children attend primary schools between the ages of six and 12. Lessons are conducted in Arabic and French is taught from the third or fourth year. At the end of the sixth year in primary school, children take an examination. Students must pass this examination in order to go on to the preparatory level of education.

Children from the ages of 12 to 14 attend preparatory schools. Here they are taught in Arabic and French. Some students may even attend special training centers. High school is only available to pupils from the ages of 14 to 18 and those who have passed the basic schooling examination and have a basic schooling certificate. During the first year of high school all students take the same subjects. The following three years are for specialization. After high school students may attend universities, colleges, or technical institutes.

People who are educated stand out amongst the Tunisian population because they can speak more than one language and are able to hold specialized jobs.



Tunisia's Culture



faithful must bow and face Mecca. The muezzin calls the people to prayer at the correct times.

- Zakat - This is the donations given to charity. Muslims are to give part of their income above what they need to build and maintain mosques and to help the poor.
- Sawm - This is the daytime fasting during the month of Ramadan. In Tunisia fasting is done if the person wishes to, and is not a state-enforced law.
- Hajj - This is the pilgrimage to Mecca. A Muslim is supposed to visit Mecca once in their lifetime during the 12th month of the lunar calendar.

The mosque is a building used for worship, a meeting place, and a place to study the Islamic religion. Usually a Muslim school is attached to the mosque where students can study the Islamic scriptures. Years ago a mosque had a building called a minaret attached to it. Five times a day the muezzin would climb the minaret to call the faithful to prayer. In Tunisia today the call to prayer is broadcast on radio and television, interrupting programming. Friday is the Muslim holy day for communal prayer. People do not work but attend prayer sessions at the mosque. The prayers can be lead by any adult man who knows the prayer forms. The man who regularly leads the prayers is called an "imam".

During prayers in a mosque on Friday, the imam faces the direction of Mecca. The men stand behind him and the women stand behind the men. Prayers are recited from the Qur'an and other phrases of praise to Allah. The people may bow from the hips or kneel with their faces to the ground. A sermon is said before the prayers.

Tunisian Clothing:

Clothing in a Muslim country is influenced by the climate, available materials, and cultural traditions which include social status, group identity, and religion. People who live in a warmer climate wear loose clothing to protect themselves from the sun and to keep cool. White or light colored clothing is cooler than dark clothing in the sunlight. Head coverings are worn for protection from the sun. Cotton fabrics are used for clothing that is worn during the hot weather. Wool is used for clothing worn during cooler weather. Camel hair is also woven into clothing for the cold weather. Some clothing is made out of plant fibers called linen. Silk is an expensive fabric that was imported from China, and is worn by only rich people.

Cultural traditions are also important in the style of clothing worn. Clothing shows the social status of its people. Married and single women might wear different clothing and head coverings. Young women nearing the age of marriage and married women would not wear the same type of clothing. Clothing worn by women outside the home is different from



Today more and more children living in poor interior areas are able to learn to read and write because schools are being built in rural areas. School begins every year after summer vacation and newspapers report stories about children going back to school and interview children about how they feel about starting school again. Everything is being done to promote education and its importance.

Tunisia's Religions:

Most Tunisians are Muslim and belong to the Sunni school of Islam. One percent are Christians and one percent are Jewish. Years ago Tunisia was the important center for Islamic learning. The Zitouna Mosque in Tunis was the main place for Islamic studies and more than 20,000 Islamic schools or "madrasas" were in operation throughout Tunisia.

The "umma" is the community of believers in Islam. This community is very large and believers are found in many countries around the world. They are found in the Middle East, North Africa, Southeast Asia, North America, and Europe. In Islam, there are two main branches called the Sunni and the Shia. Each branch does not believe the "umma" should be led in the same way. Most Tunisia's Muslims belong to the Sunni branch that also has the most believers in the world.

Islam is practiced by the majority of Tunisians and it governs their personal, economic, and legal lives. Islam came from what is today Saudi Arabia. The Prophet Muhammad is seen as the last of God's emissaries following in the footsteps of Jesus, Moses, and Abraham to bring revelation to mankind.

All Muslims share the same belief in the importance of the Five Pillars of Islam which states the responsibilities of prayer and faith. Muslims believe that they should behave ethically and do so by being generous, fair, honest, and respectful, especially in family relationships. Islam forbids adultery, gambling, usury, the eating of pork, and the drinking of alcohol. The Quran is the holy book of Islam, the "Hadith" are the sayings and teachings of Muhammad, and the "sunna" is the example of Muhammad's personal behavior. These three aspects of Islam form a guide to the spiritual, ethical, and social behavior for Sunni Muslims.

The Five Pillars of Islam are rules that all Muslims must follow. They are:

- Shahada - There is only one God and Muhammad was his last prophet. Islam also recognizes Abraham, Moses, and Jesus as prophets.
- Salat - This is the prayer performed five times a day in a special position. Prayers are said at sunrise, midday, afternoon, sunset, and evening. The

Tunisia's Culture

