

## **Tunisia**

### **Facts and Statistics**

**Location:** Northern Africa, bordering the Mediterranean Sea, between Algeria and Libya

**Capital:** Tunis

**Climate:** temperate in north with mild, rainy winters and hot, dry summers; desert in south

**Population:** 9,974,722 (July 2004 est.)

**Ethnic Make-up:** Arab 98%, European 1%, Jewish and other 1%

**Religions:** Muslim 98%, Christian 1%, Jewish and other 1%

**Government:** republic

### **The Language**

Arabic, is the official language, and while some businessmen speak English, Italian or German, French is usually the language of commerce. French is less apt to be understood in the far south. English and German are also spoken in major cities.

Why not learn some useful Arabic phrases or French phrases?

### **Tunisian Society & Culture**

#### **Islam**

Islam is practised by the majority of Tunisians and governs their personal, political, economic and legal lives. Islam emanated 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, Abraham, etc) to bring revelation to mankind. He was distinguished with bringing a message for the whole of mankind, rather than just to a certain peoples. As Moses brought the Torah and Jesus the Bible, Muhammad brought the last book, the Quran. The Quran and the actions of the Prophet (the Sunnah) are used as the basis for all guidance in the religion.

Among certain obligations for Muslims are to pray five times a day - at dawn, noon, afternoon, sunset, and evening. The exact time is listed in the local newspaper each day. Friday is the Muslim holy day so many men will go for afternoon prayers but unlike many Muslim countries the weekend is still Saturday and Sunday.

During the holy month of Ramadan all Muslims must fast from dawn to dusk and are only permitted to work six hours per day. Fasting includes no eating, drinking, cigarette smoking, or gum chewing. Expatriates are not required to fast; however, they must not eat, drink, smoke, or chew gum in public. Each night at sunset, families and friends gather together to celebrate the breaking of the fast (iftar). The festivities often continue well into the night. In general, things happen more slowly during Ramadan. Many businesses operate on a reduced schedule. Shops may be open and closed at unusual times.

#### **Tunisian Family Values**

- The family is the most significant unit of Tunisian life and plays an important role in all social relations.
- The individual is always subordinate to the family or group.
- The family consists of both the nuclear and the extended family.

