

Tunisia

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Tunisia, officially the Tunisian Republic, is located in North Africa. It is bordered by Algeria to the west and Libya to the southeast. It is the northernmost African country and the smallest of the nations situated along the Atlas mountain range. Around forty percent of the country is composed of the Sahara desert, with much of the remainder consisting of particularly fertile soil, and a 1300 km coastline. Tunisia ranks high among Middle Eastern and African nations in reports released by The World Economic Forum. Despite its relatively small size, Tunisia has great geographical and climatic diversity. The Dorsal, an extension of the Atlas Mountains, traverses Tunisia in a northeasterly direction from the Algerian border in the west to the Cape Bon peninsula. North of the Dorsal is the Tell, a region characterized by low, rolling hills and plains, although in the northwestern corner of Tunisia, the land reaches elevations of 1,050 meters. The Sahil is a plain along Tunisia's eastern Mediterranean coast famous for its olive monoculture. Inland from the Sahil, between the Dorsal and a range of hills south of Gafsa, are the Steppes. Much of the southern region is semi-arid and desert. The population estimate in July 2005 is 10,102,000 people. The majority (98%) of modern Tunisians are Arab, and are speakers of Tunisian Arabic. Tunisia enjoys a high degree of religious freedom, a right enshrined and protected through its constitutional document. Tunisia has a diverse economy, with important agricultural, mining, tourism, and manufacturing sectors. Governmental control of economic affairs while still heavy has gradually lessened over the past decade with increasing privatization, simplification of the tax structure, and a prudent approach to debt. Real growth, which averaged almost 5% over the past decade, reached 6.3% in 2007 because of development in non-textile manufacturing, a recovery in agricultural production, and strong growth in the services sector. However, Tunisia will need to reach even higher growth levels to create sufficient employment opportunities for an already large number of unemployed as well as the growing population of university graduates. Broader privatization, further liberalization of the investment code to increase foreign investment, improvements in government efficiency, and reduction of the trade deficit are among the challenges ahead. Most real estate properties in Tunis are new developments that sprang alongside with the consistent economic growth of Tunisia. Moreover, the construction industry is booming with many new townships and subdivisions being built countrywide. (