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MARCH 2020

TRIPS TO CHANGE YOUR LIFE

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SPAS IN THE WORLD

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KEYS TO ITALY'S
ARISTOCRATIC PALAZZOS

FANTASTIC BEASTS IN
BOTSWANA AND BEYOND



+ FLY-FISHING IN CHILE
AMAN COMES TO KYOTO
SPAIN'S TOP CHEFS GO CASUAL

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THE DESTINATIONS TO WATCH AROUND THE WORLD. EDITED BY ERIN FLORIO



RAISE THE ROOF

SEEKING OUT MORE MEANINGFUL TRAVEL EXPERIENCES LEADS TO THE DISCOVERY OF UNEXPECTED PLACES. TUNIS WENT THROUGH A REVOLUTION—NOW THE CITY IS HAVING A CULTURAL RENAISSANCE

WORD OF MOUTH



AN UNMARKED BLACK DOOR ON THE FRINGES of Tunis's medina marks the entrance to photographer Sabri Ben Mlouka's lair. If you've been lucky enough to score an invite to one of his private evening gatherings, you'll follow flickering candles through a restored arabesque archway into a cavernous loft furnished with tables, an unmade bed, and oversized photographs. Is this a gallery? A supper club? An eccentric's private atelier?

The answer is all of the above. Ben Mlouka rescued the abandoned building, turning it into an exhibition space for his work—black-and-white portraits of women—and a setting for the events he hosts with chef and TV personality Malek Labidi. Here, small, eclectic groups of guests experience Ben Mlouka's photography and Labidi's inventive dishes, like dates stuffed with foie gras and mint.

"For us it's a laboratory," says Ben Mlouka. "I try things in photography, she tries things in gastronomy."

That such experiments could exist in the heart of Tunis was unfathomable a decade ago, under dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. But the Tunisian Revolution, which began in late 2010 and kicked off the broader Arab Spring, changed everything. While reforms were halting—and the 2015 Sousse resort attack temporarily dampened Tunisia's ability to attract visitors—the country is stable, and today's Tunis is a city where I, as a woman on my own, felt fine taking taxis late at night. And with democracy has come creativity.

"WHEN THEY SAID, 'NOW, PEOPLE, YOU ARE COMPLETELY FREE'—THE CREATIVITY OF EVERYONE COMPLETELY EXPLODED"

"When you are in a dictator system, your mind is sleeping," says Labidi, who returned from Europe the month the revolution began. "You don't allow yourself to see all your abilities because you know you cannot realize your dreams. When they said, 'Now, people, you are completely free'—the creativity of everyone completely exploded."

Soon other Tunisians began returning home. "I wouldn't have come without the revolution," says Sofiane Ben Chaabane, who had been living in France. In the upmarket seaside suburb of La Marsa, he and his French wife, Claire, have recast a 100-year-old tiled villa as the office of their fashion brand, Lyoum. "We felt that maybe there is a new era, a new chapter," he says. "We wanted to start a brand that's a vision of the new Tunisia." In local Arabic dialect, *lyoum* means "today," and at the couple's nearby boutique, this contemporary vision is easy to find. Billowing knee-length culottes and floral dresses hang next to shirts that proclaim "Lennon loved couscous" and "Gainsbourg loved harissa."

The country has long been a production hub for global brands, like Levi's. But now, says Sofiane, "there's a new vision of *made in Tunisia*." The fresh creative energy has a centuries-old foundation—in the medina alone, there are hundreds of artisanal workshops—and young designers are

Opposite, clockwise from top left: Lamps and pillows at Supersouk; Tunis's Central Market; rugs by Supersouk; a doorway in Sidi Bou Said; books at Flayou; inside Dar Ben Gacem Kahia; Flayou backgammon board; Maison Dedine's pool; Club Gingembre; from the Flayou collection; Dar Ben Gacem Kahia; designs by Lyoum; looks from Anissa Aida; Sidi Bou Said.

Previous page: Dar Ben Gacem Kahia's rooftop

GETTING BUSY IN THE CAPITAL

ART AND SHOPPING

SELMA FERIANI GALLERY

Look for young local artists like Lina Ben Rejeb and Malek Gnaoui in this former 1960s convent, now home to Tunisia's leading gallery—set to open a location in London's Mayfair this summer. selmaferiani.com

LYOUM

Pick up a spin on the denim *dengri*, the ubiquitous traditional workman's coat, at this homegrown boutique's outposts in the suburbs of La Marsa and El Menzah 1, which celebrate a pan-Mediterranean lifestyle with floaty fabrics. lyoum.fr

SUPERSOUK

Highlights at Tunisia's top multibrand designer shop include Samaka, a menswear line by DJ-designer Aziz Kalel; minimalist wooden lamps from JK Lighting; and ceramics by the house label, Marlo & Isaure. supersoukshop.com

FLAYOU

A hard-to-categorize design studio from owners Hella El Khiari and Thomas Egoumenides—the duo offers everything from hammocks made with kitschy fabrics sourced from the medina to miniature replicas of Tunis landmarks in resin and wood. flayou.tn

ANISSA AIDA

The boutique opening in the Mutuelleville neighborhood this spring by local fashion designer Anissa Meddeb will house her minimalist collections, which combine authentic workmanship with Japanese wabi-sabi aesthetics. anissaaida.com

B7L9

The London- and Tunis-based Kamel Lazaar Foundation opened this new cultural venue in an underserved neighborhood of the city last year, bringing experimental contemporary art installations from across North Africa and the Middle East. kamellazaarfoundation.org

STAY

MAISON DEDINE

If this glamorous new five-room luxury guesthouse in Sidi Bou Said were any closer to the water, you'd be swimming. Works by contemporary Tunisian artists adorn every room. maisondedine.com

DAR BEN GACEM KAHIA

After the success of Dar Ben Gacem, the first of several traditional houses in the medina to be reborn as a hotel, owner Leila Ben Gacem opened a sister property nearby in a 17th-century house with a gleaming marble courtyard. darbengacem.com

EAT AND DRINK

DAR EL JELD

Live *qanun* music and wall-to-wall tiles set the scene for an elegant dinner in the heart of the medina. dareljeld.com

CLUB GINGEMBRE

One of the most popular nightclubs in Tunis, located in the trendy seaside district of Gammarth. clubgingembre.com

AU BON VIEUX TEMPS

Rub shoulders with artists and designers over pasta and regional wine at this lively bistro in La Marsa. [facebook.com/bonviemarsa](https://www.facebook.com/bonviemarsa) S.K.

WORD OF MOUTH



blending traditional workmanship with global sensibilities.

For her label Anissa Aida, designer Anissa Meddeb, who lives in the capital, makes gossamer silk blouses evoking the striped motif of handwoven *fouta* towels and voluminous coats inspired by the burnoose cloaks worn by Berbers. Design studio Flayou, founded by Tunisian repat Hella El Khiari and her French husband, Thomas Egoumenides, applies techniques of Sejnane wood-fired pottery to chess- and backgammon boards. Baraa Ben Boubaker shuttles between Nice and Tunis to work on her breezy resortwear with experts in the dyeing crafts, like *ogla* embroidery from Gabes and *hayek* weaving from Kairouan.

For a quick tour of Tunisia's creative renaissance, hit Supersouk, a gleaming two-story design emporium that houses 120 homegrown labels, most launched within the past few years. "When I was young, under Ben Ali, it was not the same Tunisia. When I left I said, 'I'll never come back, bye-bye!'" recalls its cofounder Isaure Bouyssonie, who is from a French family that has lived here for six generations. But she returned with her Swiss husband, Marlo Kara, in 2015 to create Supersouk and the furniture-and-housewares label Marlo & Isaure. They embody the hope that endures in Tunisia, even as the promise of the Arab Spring has faded for the country's neighbors. "We just try to live every day," says Labidi, "and make our dreams come true." SARAH KHAN

Above from top: A guest room at Dar Ben Gacem Kahia; playing chess near the medina



A melanistic serval at Asilia Namiri Plains camp, in the Serengeti

ANIMAL MAGIC

A WAVE OF NEW LODGES ARE BUILDING CONSERVATION-DRIVEN EXPERIENCES AROUND ENCOUNTERS WITH ELUSIVE SPECIES

When the team at the high-end ecolodge Nayara Springs in Costa Rica began reforesting an area on the edge of Arenal National Park, they had a secondary mission: to provide some companionship for their resident sloth, Tony. Now, the leaves of the cecropia trees they planted provide sustenance for more than 15 native two- and three-toed sloths, which are the central draw of the just-opened **Nayara Tented Camp** (doubles from \$1,200; nayaratentedcamp.com). An on-hand naturalist monitors the community, rescuing any babies that fall out of trees and pointing out the slow-moving creatures to guests. More and more hotels around the world are, like Nayara, creating experiences—often connected to conservancies—built around a single unique animal species.

This all gained momentum with Giraffe Manor, the iconic hotel in Nairobi, says Teresa Sullivan, an Africa specialist and the cofounder of Mango Safaris. "That has been a specific request for a long time. Today's traveler is looking for something bigger," Sullivan adds, "something timeless, where they can feel connected to nature. That's where the magic is." **AndBeyond Phinda Mountain Lodge** in South Africa (from \$540; andbeyond.com) has created a program dedicated

to reintroducing the pangolin, one of the world's rarest and most trafficked animals. Guests can take part in the conservation effort by helping to locate the elusive scaly anteaters and replacing their tags. Elsewhere on the continent, in the eastern Serengeti, a long-closed region is now open to visitors of **Asilia Namiri Plains** (from \$893 per person; asiliaafrica.com) to search out the melanistic serval, a big-eared all-black cat rarely seen by safarigoers. Such experiences exist closer to home too. The super-luxe **Caldera House** in Jackson Hole (two-bedroom suites from \$2,500; calderahouse.com) has introduced a Yellowstone winter game drive in partnership with Jackson Hole Wildlife Safaris that will take guests to track and photograph the wolves that were famously reintroduced to the park 25 years ago. Even **Airbnb** is trying out the approach: Its new Animal Experiences program in partnership with World Animal Protection offers hosted wildlife excursions with more than 300 species around the world—from arctic foxes in Iceland (from \$200 per person) to gibbons in Phuket (from \$96 per person). Such encounters, says Sullivan, are "bonding, memorable, sensory. They're what you walk away with—and what you tell stories about later." STEPHANIE WU