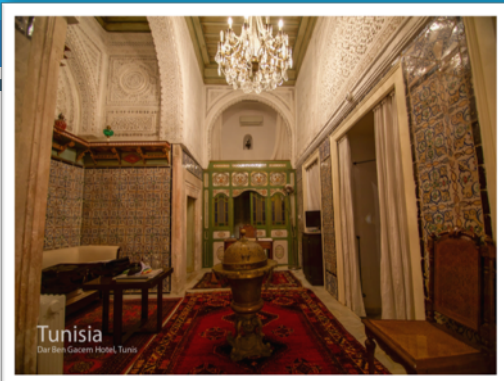


# Libya & Tunisia



Magnificent Leptis  
Magna, Sabratha and  
Jebel Nafusa

December 2018



## ...Libya at last

We had only two options to get to Libya. Either from Istanbul directly to Tripoli or via Tunis. We decided upon the Tunis option as this gave us a slightly wider choice of Libyan flights. There are two state-owned operators (not to be trusted) and then there is the privately-operated Libyan Wings which is the recommended one. So, we flew in the evening before and spent a night in the old Medina of Tunis. Unfortunately, it was Sunday evening and most shops in the souk and restaurants were closed. We checked in at a lovely old private villa recently restored and converted into a **Guesthouse. The Dar Ben Gacem.**

We arrived on time to Tripoli from Tunis at around noon the following day and were picked up by **Fadel Usta**, the brother of **Ibrahim Usta** – the part-owner of **Sherwes Travel** and transported to **our hotel – The Victoria in the centre of Tripoli.** There we were met by our guide and driver for the Libyan tour. Our **Guide Yousef** and the **driver Salem** greeted us and briefed us on the first day's program. We checked in and were very pleased with the hotel and the rooms, and thereafter took a lunch buffet on the top-floor of the hotel. A lovely view overlooking part of Tripoli from the 8<sup>th</sup> floor.

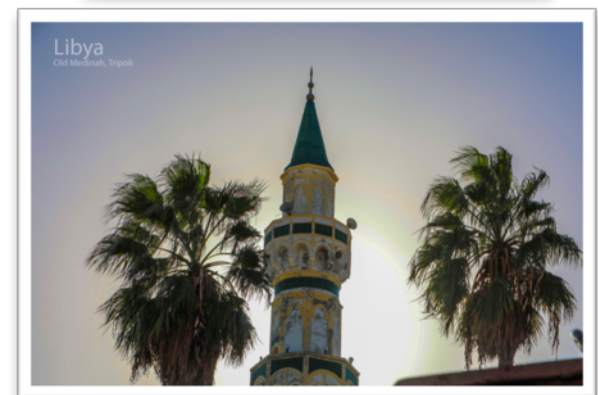


..Tripoli, a city where the Gunshots still can be heard



We then set-off to do **the old Medinah** and some other parts of the city with our excellent guide Yousef. Very knowledgeable about history and architecture he showed us around the areas where it was possible and safe to walk. Parts of the old Medinah were not advised to cover on foot – so this was avoided. Furthermore, we had to be very careful and follow instructions on where to use our cameras. People were generally quite friendly, but often very weary, about our cameras. People seemed to have a deep sense of being spied upon and did not want to end up in a picture. There were parts where we could take photos however, and then especially of buildings. We stopped for a coffee break after a very long walk at the **famous Galleria di Aurora** overlooking the **old Christian dome** now converted into a huge mosque.

Dinner was taken at the **seafood restaurant near the Cornish at a place called 555**. Quite OK really. Please note that Libya is a “dry” country where alcohol is not possible to consume nor served in hotels or restaurants. Things has gotten stricter regarding this and religious interpretation of the Koran, even more so after the death of Khaddaffi back in 2011. We also heard gunshots at night from the hotel outside at a distance.





## Visiting the Berber settlements

We checked out in the early morning to drive south towards **Jebel Nafusa a 3-hour drive**. We visited the **old Berber Castle called Qasr al Hajj ruins**. Very few if any foreigners come here today after the down bringing of Khaddaffi back in 2011. Especially since there are no tourist visas issued today. This was really spectacular and worth seeing. From here we continued up the mountains to **the Berber village of Jadu**. Our guide Mr. Yousef as well as our driver Mr. Salem both were born in this village and still had relatives there. We took lunch at the **Turmisa Berber site** built before Roman times. This on a cliff overlooking the valley. An absolutely astonishing view.

Our trip then continued to **Gharyan**, ca: 2 hour's drive from Jadu where we stopped and stayed overnight at a **Gharyan Trykodyte cave** underground. These old caves underground was said to be dated back to before Christ and has always been a traditional way of living in this area in particular. The owner Arbi was very service minded and made us feel very welcome to his caves below ground. In the evening he brought his youngest daughter dressed up in a traditional Berber wedding dress – just so that we could see these amazing costumes which they wear at these special occasions. I had actually asked for Yousef to take us to a place where we could enjoy and see traditionally dressed Berber. Today, however, it is very rare that they dress up this way as they have grown accustomed to simpler way of dressing. We also made a quick stop to see the pottery making in **Al Qawasim**.





## West of Tripoli - Sabratha....

We checked out in the early morning to drive north towards Sabratha and had to drive back via Tripoli (2 hours) in order then to continue the coastal road for another hour and half to get there. Our guide Yusef and driver Salem were very itchy and worried about the drive through western Tripoli to Sabratha, not having been back there since the last fights back in September. **This section is still not fully secure and there are pockets with extremist groups such as Al Kaida or Daesh doing raids from time to time here.** We again had to pass through many checkpoints and many bridges and houses along the way had been hit by mortars and artillery. No photography was allowed on route. We saw severely damaged houses and bridges along the way.

At Sabratha we were the only visitors apart from some very few locals. Again, Sherwes travel do not take foreign travellers here on a regular basis. It was only at the specific request by Ibrahim Usta, the part-owner based in Sweden, that they unwillingly agreed to guide us to this old World Heritage site of Sabratha. Unfortunately, much of the grounds had not been maintained over the years since Khaddaffi was killed back in 2011. The area around the site has mostly been used to ship out African boat refugees to Malta and Italy. It is not long ago since there were frequent 'washing-ups' of dead bodies on the shores. We did find the odd life jacket, shoes and backpacks used most likely by these unfortunate people.

We had a superb lunch however at the small town near Sabratha and then drove back to Tripoli. We rested up a couple of hours and then went on to have dinner at another fine restaurant in Tripoli - The Safir, an Indian restaurant. We hear later in the evening that six people had been killed in the area which we passed.





## Leptis Magna and Villa Silén

The last full day in Libya was folded for **Leptis Magna**. We saved the best for last so to speak. This magnificent ancient Roman site is a **2-hour drive to the east of Tripoli near Khoms**. We left early morning to make sure to get the most out of the day. We spent some 4 hours covering all the major sites around the Leptis Magna such as: **The arch of Marcus Aurelius, The arch of Septimus Severus, The Forum, the Hadrian Baths, The Roman markets, the theatre, the Amphitheatre of Leptis Magna, the harbour** and much more. We had a **late lunch at the Hassanin Hotel** and then **continued to visit Villa Silene**.

The Villa was discovered by accident back in 1974 by an expatriate who had been at the beach. A top-piece of the villa was sticking out of the sand otherwise completely covered in sand. This bit sticking out had some beautiful mosaic showing a lionhead and more. The 20 room and 800 m2 large villa is still under excavation and renovation at the moment. We were however allowed to enter and guided by a local archaeologist who know our driver and tour organizer Mr. Salem, otherwise we would not have been admitted to visit and see some of these amazing frescos still almost intact.

On the way back to Tripoli **we also made a stop at one of the Palm Oil factories**. Very interesting to see how they extract oil out. Well back in the city we decided to play it safe and visit the **Indian restaurant – Safir**, which we had been to the evening before and had excellent food. We took an early evening and went to bed in order to be ready to leave the following morning at 07:00 AM.





# Villa Silén, a magnificent coastal villa

