



THE GREAT ROMAN COLISEUM at El Jem, in central Tunisia, rises at the end of a street in the modern Arab town. Much of the south and west sides is intact, presenting a striking appearance in the fading light of a winter day.

Parts of the interior have been restored and several movies have been filmed in the arena. In size, the stadium is said to be nearly as big as those in Rome and Verona.

On tour in Tunisia

History, beauty in Africa

If you had to go just one place in Tunisia, it'd have to be the great coliseum at El Jem, south of Tunis and midway to the Sahara.

The great stadium has been stabilized and some parts restored, with much of the outer wall standing as it did two thousand years ago.

You could stand in the center of the arena, run your fingers through the soil and feel the blood of martyrs of the church, mingled with that of slaves, gladiators and other victims of the arena.

You might be in the middle of a movie set, because many American films with a Roman setting have been filmed here. There's the doorway Mel Gibson might have emerged from, and most certainly some poor Christian, in the days before Rome was converted.

Incongruously, there's a galvanized steel grate over the subterranean cells where the lions were kept, rather than wood planks. That doesn't do much to change the awe and the horror of this place, but it is beautiful in the fading sun.

You should stop and take in the view from the hill of Carthage, where civilization stretches back more than 3,000 years. Then go read about the Punic Wars, which ended with the death of the city and the enslavement of what was left of her people.

I'd recommend the museum at Sousse, where they have so many Roman mosaics that the lesser ones have been used to pave the court-



yards. You might be walking on a 2,200-year-old work of art.

There are statues everywhere, most broken. Someone asked why. When the bloody Romans were sent packing, it seems, people took their revenge out on the art.

To the north of the old city of Sousse, developers are creating a beachfront resort to rival anything found in Mexico or any tropical nation. Gleaming yachts ride in the slips of the marina; hotels beckon to the hordes of German and French tourists to come each year. Golf

courses, shops, restaurants line the streets.

Closer to Tunis, just 30 miles south, is the quaint village of Hammamet, with its American-style depot and its white beaches. Houses rent cheaply in the off season, and hotels go for as little as \$25 per person per night, breakfast and dinner included. They insisted that we try the food.

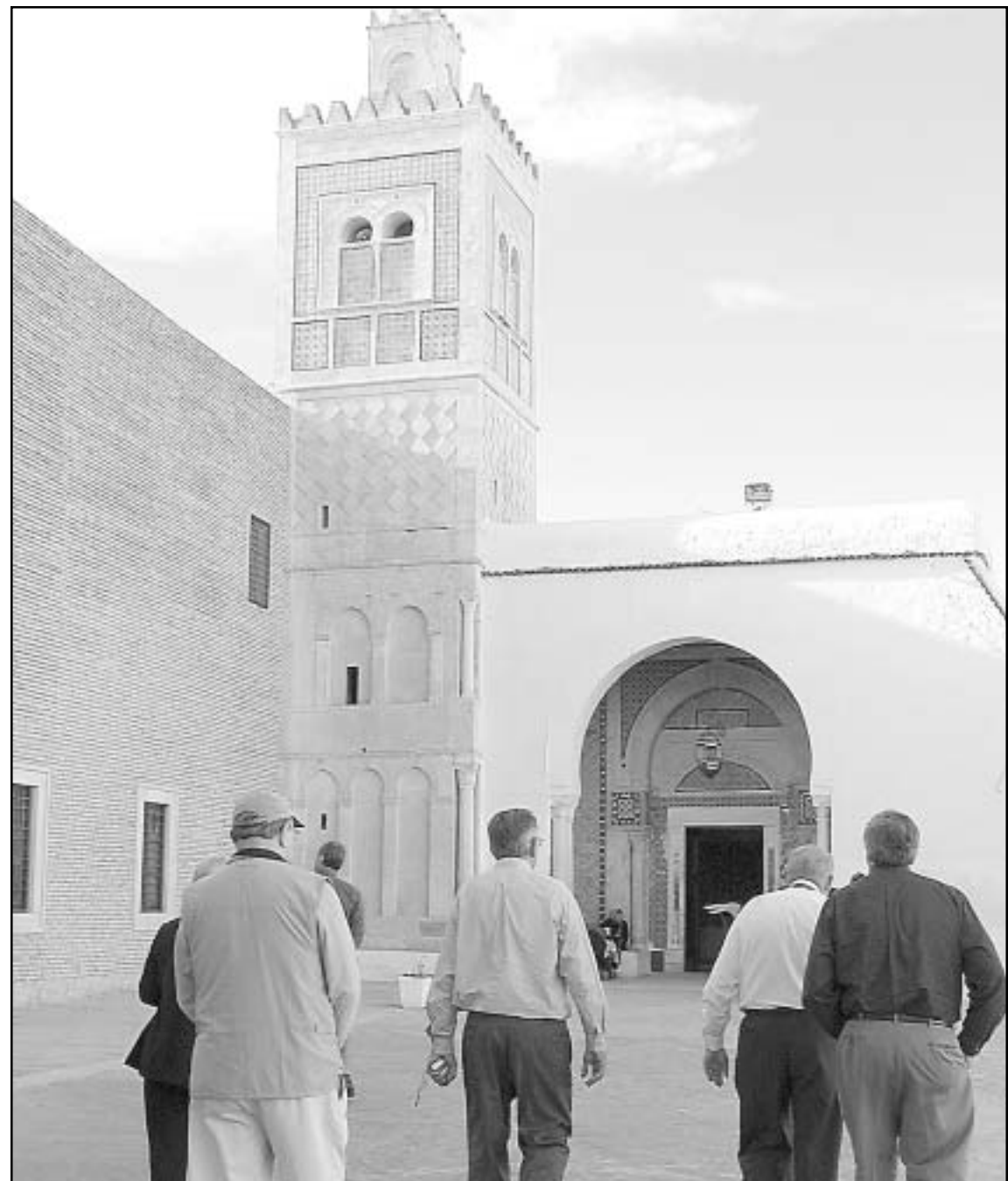
Downtown, in the old walled cities known as the Medina, you'd find mosques dating back 1,300 years, and shops and food stands and more. Cafes will rent you a water pipe with sanitized mouthpiece, but be careful. The tobacco is potent.

It's a fascinating place. It's amazing to think that of 7 million tourists a year in this beautiful corner of North Africa, only 10,000 are Americans.

If you shop for fares, you can fly to Tunis for under \$1,000. It's only a two-hour hop from Paris, an hour from Rome. The mountains, the fields and olive orchards, the desert, the beaches, they're all beautiful.

I'd go back in a minute.

Steve Haynes, editor of The Oberlin Herald and president of Nor'West Newspapers, toured Tunisia as a guest of the government in January as part of a delegation of American journalists.



AMERICAN EDITORS (above) walked toward the mosque at Kairouan, in central Tunisia. The building, begun centuries ago and added to over the ages, still serves as a house of God. Downtown Tunis (below) is teeming with plenty of new cars and modern German-built trolley cars almost identical to those used in Denver. Palms line wide French-era boulevards.

THE VIEW from our hotel (above) was spectacular, all palms and green with flowers. Camels (right) grazed along a highway. Two women walked (far right) together, one in Western clothes, one in traditional dress.



Western garb is far more common, especially in the cities.

