Chapter 38
Tunis 2014



For reasons that will become clear, I was not able to write a journal during this trip. But I did make notes in my iPhone, which I'm now using to recall details. The trip was to Tunisia, a small country on the north coast of Africa wedged between Algeria and Libya. It was in Tunisia that the Arab Spring started in 2010, with protests and a revolution overthrowing its long-time ruler. Other countries then experienced something similar, but Tunisia is the only country where the revolution has led to what is so far a stable and peaceful democracy.

Monday, July 28, 2014

This trip was the idea of Barbara Peitsch, the same person who, regular readers may recall, conceived my trip to Cancun for the WTO ministerial in 2003. Barbara runs a series of faculty trips, for which she has sought and received funding from the US State Department. Some of these trips bring young faculty from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region to Ann Arbor, and others bring faculty from the US to the MENA region. She has been running these exchanges for several years, most recently through the Institute for Social Research here at U of M. As a result, she has gotten to know many young scholars both here and abroad, and they are all very appreciative of her efforts.

One of them is Leila Bahgdadi, a trade economist on the faculty of the Tunisia Business School (TBS). A while back, Barbara brought her to meet me in my office. Then later, she mentioned that Leila had applied to the World Trade Organization for funding of a "WTO Chair" at TBS, which would contribute to curriculum, research, and outreach in the area of international trade. She was awarded the chair – one of several that the WTO

has funded in different places – and Barbara had the idea of our traveling to Tunis for me to advise Leila on this undertaking. Thus our trip, together, for about a week in Tunis.



Leila, from trip.

Leila does not yet actually have the money from the WTO, but Barbara thought that she could cover the travel herself from her State Department funds, and in addition she was able to get additional funding from the State Department to cover our expenses in Tunis. As it happened, I discovered that my own funding balance was approaching the maximum that UM allows, and I would get little of my next annual installment if I did not spend some. So, we charged my air ticket to my account, although both tickets were purchased on Barbara's "P-card" – her university credit card.

I mention this because our trip began with a bit of a problem. As we rode a Metro Car to the airport, Barbara mentioned that a few days before, she had gotten a call from Chase Bank, the issuer of her P-card, saying that there were some unusual charges to her card. They were indeed ones that she had not made, and they cancelled the card, had her destroy it, and sent her a new one. She went over all the charges with them on the phone explaining which ones, including the purchase of our tickets, were legitimate and she was assured that she'd have no problem.

But when she tried to check in for the flight from her computer, she was not able to, and she suspected it was because of this problem. Then when I tried to check in also at a kiosk at the airport, the machine asked me to swipe the credit card that had been used to pay for the ticket. I could not do that, of course, and neither could Barbara, since she had cut up the card. We went to the check-in counter to resolve this. It was not easy. The tickets had been flagged because of the cancellation of the card, despite the assurances from Chase Bank. Barbara did her best to persuade them to reinstate the tickets, but they could not. Instead, she used her new card to purchase two new tickets for us, with assurance that the previous tickets would be refunded. I hope they were.

So, with some delay, we did get our boarding passes and went first to the Sky Club and then to the gate, where we boarded the Air France flight on time. However, just a few minutes after the flight was to depart, the captain came on the intercom and announced that the flight was cancelled due to engine trouble. As this was the last flight of the day,

there was no chance of still getting out that day, and we took another Metro Car back home.

First, though, we tried to book an alternate flight. I called Delta and was told first that we'd have to wait until Wednesday – two days later. When I pressed, they first found a flight on Lufthansa through Frankfurt, and when that turned out to be unavailable, one through Rome on Alitalia. I took that and hung up the phone. But within minutes, the agent called back – but on Barbara's phone, not mine – to say that the flight from Rome to Tunisia was also not available. The best they could do, it seemed, was a Delta flight to Charles De Gaulle airport, CDG, followed by a Tunis Air flight out of a different Paris airport, Orly. That would be a hassle, and Barbara tried hard to get something better. Her laptop told her that there were first-class seats available on an Air France connection from CDG to Tunis, and she tried to get them to let us have those seats, but they would not. We had no choice but to accept the inconvenience of changing airports in Paris. Fortunately, there was lots of time between the flights, as we would arrive CDG at 7:45 AM and not depart Orly until 2:40 PM.

Tuesday, July 29

Taking our third Metro Car in two days, we went to the airport again and this time had no trouble with checking in or taking off. Because of our last-minute booking, our seats were middle seats, not aisle or window, and several rows apart. I didn't get much sleep, but I did get some work done on my laptop that I was pleased with.

Wednesday, July 30

In Paris it might have been possible to travel directly from CDG to Orly, but with the time we had available, we decided instead to take the train into the center of Paris and visit a café that Barbara likes. (She lived in Paris working at the OECD for several years.) The train was not overcrowded, and we were able to sit together with empty seats facing us. I put my suitcase at my feet and my backpack on the seat opposite.

At some point, a man bumped us from behind and dropped some coins down the back of our seat between us. One of us handed him the coins, but he seemed sure that there were more still there, and we helped him look and assured him that there were not more. When he moved away, we looked at each other wondering what that was all about. Then I learned the answer when I looked at the seat opposite. My backpack was gone. Suddenly it was clear: it had been a ruse to distract us as the man's partner picked up my backpack and made away with it.

We looked around the car of the train, but of course there was nothing to see. Whoever had taken the backpack was long gone, and our fellow passengers were oblivious, either actually or pretending to be.

It didn't take long for me to realize most of what I'd lost: my laptop, iPad, and passport case all came immediately to mind. Later I would realize that I'd put my keys into the

backpack as well, and my medicines. But at the moment the main concern was the passport, since we were scheduled to fly out of the country in just a few hours. Barbara picked the train stop she knew to be closest to the US Embassy, and we headed there.

It seemed very unlikely to both of us that I could get a new passport in time for us to make our flight, but we tried. And amazingly, we succeeded. At the consulate, we were told that we couldn't take any bags inside, so I left Barbara outside with both our suitcases, and a plan that we would meet either in the park across the street or in a nearby café. Inside, I also had to give up my phone, which they held for me. They sent me to a bank of computers to fill out a passport application.

The first machine I tried turned out to be programmed for a French keyboard, even though it looked English. That is, each time I tried to start entering my name and pressed the A key, a Q would appear on the screen. If the letters on the keys had matched what they were programmed for, I might have managed, slowly. But without that, I had no chance. So, I looked for another computer, hoping to find one I could use. It turned out that the one next to me was fine, and the person sitting at it was just a kid playing, so I soon was filling out my application with no problem. In fact, it was surprisingly straightforward. When I was done, following instructions I sent it to the nearby printer. I also found a booth across the room that would take my photo, plus a change machine for converting euro notes to coins, since that was needed. Instructions for the photo were in French, and I struggled with that, but I got a usable photo anyway. Usable, but rather angry looking.

The next step was to check in for another room, where I was given a slip of paper with a number and told to watch for that number to appear on the monitors telling which window to go to. The wait seemed long, but it probably wasn't more than 20 minutes. It seemed long because I didn't have my iPhone to amuse me.

When my number came up, a pleasant woman at my assigned window took my application and photo and asked my situation. I asked if there was any chance that I'd make my flight, and she thought I probably could, as it shouldn't take more than two hours. That would be cutting it close, but I was hopeful. She said to take a seat again and watch for my number, as another person would then interview me. The "interview" turned out to be another pleasant woman who asked me to raise my right hand and "swear or affirm" that everything I'd said in the form was truthful. That was it. She said my new passport should be ready in half an hour. She was wrong. She had it for me in less than ten minutes. Overall, from the time I arrived at the consulate, it took less than two hours to get my new passport. It was only good for a year, and I'm supposed to apply for a new long-term one as soon as possible. But I was on my way.

Leaving the consulate, I collected my iPhone and wondered how I'd find Barbara. But she was there outside, waiting for me. She had texted me to learn how I was doing, but without my phone I hadn't replied. So off we went to Orly.

We got there in plenty of time, but our problems were not quite over. At the check-in counter, Tunis Air said we did not have tickets. That is, they had our reservations in the system, but no ticket numbers. We needed to go to the Tunis Air ticket office, across the terminal, to get ticket numbers before we could check in. We went to the ticket office, but the woman there said the only ticket numbers she could find in the system had been refunded and therefore were not valid. Barbara then got on the phone with Delta, and amazingly she was able almost instantly first to get a person, not a machine, and then to have that person be able to tell the Tunis Air agent the correct ticket numbers. Apparently, when our first flight was cancelled and rebooked on a different airline, that changed the ticket numbers, and somehow Tunis Air had been sent the old numbers, not the new ones, even though the old ones had been purely on Air France. Anyhow, this was our last glitch, and with the correct ticket numbers written on a scrap of paper, we were able to check in and fly to Tunis.

From there on, our visit was hosted by several of Barbara's participants from her previous exchanges, all of whom were wonderful to us. We were met at the Tunis airport by Rafa Ayadi and an older man whom I only later learned was his father. They met us as we left the airport and handed us each a bouquet of fresh flowers. Rafa shook my hand, and his father – who at this point I assumed was just our driver – greeted me with the double air kiss that is apparently French and seems to be widely used in Tunisia. I call it a "double air kiss" for want of a better name: you lean in and graze the right cheek of the other person while mouthing a kiss into the air, not on their cheek, and then you do the same on the other side.

It was a longish ride to the hotel, perhaps 45 minutes, in part because we'd arrived in late afternoon that was rush hour. During the ride, Rafa and Barbara chatted mostly, as they hadn't seen each other for some time. The driver, Rafa's father, was silent.

Our hotel was the Mövenpick, part of a Swiss chain of very nice hotels and resorts. Because the State Department was paying for our expenses, we were constrained by the rates that it approves. Barbara had originally booked us into a Sheraton, but they had refused to give her the government rate, and to her surprise, the Mövenpick was willing to give that rate even though I gather that it is a much nicer hotel. We checked in without incident, except that they had my reservation for fewer nights than we had planned. The plan was for Barbara to depart on Monday and me on Wednesday, but they had us both leaving on Monday. Told that this was not correct, the man at the desk said there was nothing he could do, as the hotel was fully booked. This struck me as yet another serious problem – where would I stay, after Barbara was gone? But she seemed unconcerned, and she was right. Her contact at the US Embassy had this fixed within a day. The only inconvenience was that my plastic key card expired on Monday, and I had to request another at the desk.

The Mövenpick is different from any hotel I've ever stayed in. Its rooms extend in three separate rows along the ground from the main building, parallel to the beach. All rooms have windows, door, and small terraces that open to the sea, but the rooms are entered from a long curving hallway that is built into the hill behind them. The lowest tier of rooms is only a few feet from the beach and is built into the hillside so that the next tier seems also to open onto the beach, even though it doesn't, really. The third tier is by far the longest with the most rooms, and the view from these is somewhat blocked by the second tier. My room was in the second tier, just a few steps from the end closest to the hotel's main building. Barbara's was near the far end of the third tier, and therefore she had both a worse view and a much longer walk to reach it.



Mövenpick Hotel from trip.

The portion of the beach in front of the hotel seemed to be reserved for hotel guests, although the public could walk across it to get from one side to the other. Next to the hotel's part of the beach was a larger beach that was open to the public and had many more people. Both portions had large straw umbrellas fixed to the ground with something like chaise lounges available under them. The sea and the beach were beautiful, and the buildings of the hotel were low-key and unobtrusive.

The hotel had several restaurants. Barbara, who had stayed there before, remembered one called The Breeze, down by the beach, and we met there for dinner. The only tables available were outside, which was fine, and they were not very well lit. I had my first of several meals of sea bass, which at this point I had not yet learned could be ordered filleted. As a result, I struggled in the dark to find my way to the flesh and avoid the bones.

I turned in early, expecting to sleep well, as I had not slept much on the plane. But I lay awake quite a while reliving the loss of my backpack and its implications. A surprising amount of my life was in there, although most of it can be replaced.

Thursday, July 31

I had texted and e-mailed Pat about the loss, including both my keys and my meds. She wasted no time getting the locks changed on our house, already on Thursday. As for the meds, I figured that I'd be fine without them for a week, and I still believe that. But she and others were very concerned about the diabetes meds, which include insulin that I inject twice a day. By Thursday morning Barbara had already inquired of others about where we could find a doctor to prescribe what I needed. To her surprise and mine, she learned that we could just go to a pharmacy and buy things without a prescription. So that's what we did, first thing. Conveniently, I keep a list of my meds on my iPhone, which I still had, so at the pharmacy it was easy to say what I needed, and they had the exact products that I take at home.

Leila picked Barbara and me up at the hotel. When she arrived, she presented Barbara with a necklace of jasmine to wear and me with a sprig of jasmine to put in my shirt pocket. I've since seen that the latter are very common, being sold by vendors on the streets and presented by people to others they are with.



Barbara and Leila, with another from trip.

The three of us tried to go for lunch to a restaurant that Leila knew, but we were turned away because they had no food. It turns out that our visit coincided with the end of the holiday that immediately follows Ramadan, the Muslim month of fasting. The holiday is called Eid Al-Fitr, or just Eid, and in Tunisia it seems to last three days, which this year were Monday-Wednesday of the week we arrived. During Eid people celebrate much as we do for Christmas, with gifts and lots of eating. The restaurant had done such good business the day before that it had run out of food and now needed to close for lunch until more food was delivered.

We found another restaurant and had a long working lunch. Leila explained much more about her project, and I provided what advice I could. Most helpful, I hope, will turn out to be the names that I gave her of trade economists especially in Europe whom I'll introduce to her and suggest she invite for the conference she'll hold in Tunis next summer.

As we finished our lunch, Leila paid for it by writing a check. This surprised me. In the US, while we still do use checks for paying some bills, most of us don't carry a checkbook or use it in stores and restaurants anymore. But more to the point, with Tunisia's closeness to France, I expected customs to be very European, and my understanding is that checks are essentially obsolete in Europe. But apparently that change has not made it to Tunisia. I'm pretty sure that Leila was a typical Tunisian.

The place we ate was in a hotel, and while we ate indoors, we could see the hotel pool just outside with lots of people enjoying it. What surprised me was that one of these people was a middle-aged woman dressed all in black and covered all over except her face. Women with their heads covered are quite common here, though still a minority, so the fact of one dressed this way was not surprising. But I wondered what the point was of being at a swimming pool, in the bright and hot sun, if that was the way you had to be

dressed. Leila didn't really provide an explanation – I'm not sure she really understood my question. But she did explain that head covering is becoming more common these days, not less. This is something that she and other very secular Muslims are not very happy about.

I think the neighborhood where we ate was La Marsa. If not, then we must have gone there next, where we walked around for a while. Then we drove to another neighborhood, called Sidi Bou Said, which was teaming with tourists. There we met another of Barbara's participants, a man whose name was – I think – Anise.

We walked through that neighborhood, along a street that went up a hill and then down the other side toward the sea. It was on that street that we met a man with a hawk, and I got several photos of myself with the hawk, on my arms, my shoulder, and my head. I posted one of these to Facebook and got a quick reply from a friend in Bangkok who said she had the same photo of herself in the same place. Standard tourist stuff, of course, but fun.

The neighborhood had a lot of charm. The buildings were mostly white cement but with decorations – windows, and doors – painted blue. There were many very elaborate doors, most often blue with black studs providing designs on them.

We ate our evening meal on the street. A very small restaurant had a cooker out front that consisted mainly of a metal dome kept hot by a flame underneath. The cook started with a ball of dough that he pressed onto the dome and spread out into a large pancake. That became the bread for a sandwich of ingredients that were then also cooked on the dome. I had one with beef, and it was delicious.



Barbara, Anise, Leila, and me, from trip.



With a hawk, from trip.

Back at the hotel, I took a break to use the hotel's business center to print, sign, scan, and e-mail a form that I needed to get to a publisher. I was surprised at how easy this turned out to be.

Later, we had drinks on the hotel terrace, overlooking the sea, with Anise and another participant, Ali.

Friday, August 1



US Embassy, from Web 2025

We started Friday with a visit to the US Embassy. I expected it to be large and well-fortified against possible attack. It may have been, but I never got much of a sense of what it looked like, as it seemed to be just a nondescript cluster of buildings surrounded by empty land that one wasn't allowed to enter. Our first attempt to drive there failed, as a guard told us to take another route. Leila then drove us to another side of the complex, where we parked on the street and were able to walk to it. Knowing that we'd not be able to take phones into the embassy, we left them in the trunk of her car. We still had to pass through a metal detector, much like an airport, and I had to unload coins from my pocket.

In the embassy, we had a long meeting with two men. One was an American communications guy, and though he was nice, he wasn't very knowledgeable. But the other was a Tunisian expert on commerce, and we had a wonderful conversation from which I learned a lot, including about trade policy. We also talked about Tunisia's management of its exchange rate. I tried to convince him that Tunisia should let its currency depreciate, but he remained very much against that.

We went again to La Marsa where we met a woman that Leila works with. Her name, I think, was Karina, and she had with her her 13-year-old son, Julian (whom she called Juju). We walked down toward the sea to a restaurant that they favored, but we found that it was closed until later in the day. We picked another restaurant. Unlike the one where we'd eaten the day before, this one was not air-conditioned. Fortunately, it wasn't too terribly hot, and with windows and doors open, there was a breeze.

Barbara had told me to expect that food in Tunisia would often be Italian, so I wasn't surprised to find pasta carbonara on the menu. I ordered it, and while it wasn't as good as I think I'd get in Italy, it was decent. Others tried to order various seafood items, but several of these were not available. I'm not sure what they ended up eating. This was another working lunch, to some extent, as we talked about Leila's project, the curriculum for which will also be supported by money that Karina's organization was contributing.

Karina and her son left us after lunch, and we devoted some time to trying to buy a charger for my iPhone. My own charger had been in my backpack, and I'd survived so

far by borrowing Barbara's charger to use overnight. I'd seen plenty of people with iPhones here, so I thought finding a charger wouldn't be hard, but it was. After we'd tried several stores, we gave up. Barbara and I developed a routine of my borrowing her charger each night and returning it in the morning.



Barbara with our guide, from trip.

We next drove to some Roman ruins. I should explain (what was news to me) that Tunis is the site of the ancient city of Carthage. Carthage was a prosperous trading center before Rome existed, but when Rome rose, they became enemies and eventually the Romans destroyed Carthage. Its location must have been good, however, since the Romans then built it back into a strong city for themselves. As a result, there are many Roman ruins in the portion of Tunis that even today is called Carthage. That's what we visited.

We got there just before a man was about to close the gates at 5:00 PM. But he let us in and offered to be our guide, which we accepted. He was wonderful, and I wish I'd gotten his name. We gave him a nice tip at the end. He told us a good deal of history as well as explaining things that we saw. There were many slabs of mosaic designs, propped against a wall in a sort-of tunnel.



Roman ruins, from Web 2025

Then, without him, we drove to a Christian cathedral, not what I'd have expected in a mostly Muslim country. There was a period in history, after the Romans and before the Muslims, when the country was Christian –

indeed it adopted Christianity before the Romans. But the cathedral doesn't date from then. The French built it when Tunisia was a French colony. It was very pretty, and it was slightly interesting in that the arches and the stained-glass windows had a shape that was more Arabic than you'd see in Europe.



Cathedral of St. Vincent de Paul, Tunis, from Wikipedia 2025

The church was preparing for a concert that evening, and the young musicians were scattered around practicing individually on their instruments. It gave a nice semi-musical backdrop for our exploration of the church. The musicians seemed to be from Germany.

Barbara and I returned to the hotel, and after a short break, had dinner. The hotel had several restaurants, but one was closed for no apparent reason, and another was hosting a big event with the Swiss embassy hosting other diplomats, so we ate at the buffet, the only option, in the basic restaurant where breakfast is served. It was quite good.

Barbara's Wi-Fi hadn't been working for the last day or so, but she had work to do that needed it. She planned to try working in the hallway, closer to the routers. We left it that if that did not work, she'd come to my room. I had a router in my room, for some reason, and my Wi-Fi was always excellent, although I only had my iPhone to take advantage of it. She never came, as working in the hall was successful, but not very comfortable, as the hallways are not air-conditioned.

Saturday, August 2

Barbara and I took a taxi to the Bordo Museum. She had been there before, years ago, but it had only recently reopened after a renovation. It was wonderful. Most of what it displayed were ancient Roman mosaics that had been unearthed by archeologists. All were beautifully mounted on the bare walls of many rooms. Most were incomplete, but missing portions were tastefully indicated with suggestions of what must have been there originally. The building itself also had some wonderful decorations. I've forgotten now what the building was originally, but since



Roman treasures in Bordo Museum, from Web 2025

Tunisia was a kingdom for a long time, I imagine it was some sort of royal palace. I see now that I have a photo of a fancy bed, so it must have been something like that. [I've lost the photo.]

The plan was that Leila would join us after the museum, so we looked for a coffee shop to wait in. Maps of the museum showed one, but it was closed – or perhaps more accurately, it had not been opened yet after the renovation, even though it already appeared in the maps. We went outside, crossed the road, and found a wonderful outdoor café. The seating area was large, and despite that it was totally covered with the branches of trees or vines, so that it was in the shade. We took a table and ordered drinks.

As we looked around, there were perhaps a dozen or two other customers, sitting at tables in groups of one, two, or three. All were men. Barbara recalled from earlier visits that many places like this were not frequented by women, and she wondered why. Nobody seemed to object to her presence here, and as it was just across the street from a museum, I must believe that woman tourists came there often, even though none happened to be there now. Barbara later asked Leila about this, but all she learned was that some cafés only attract men, and others get both. How one could know the difference, we didn't learn.

After Leila found us, she drove us to the Medina. The word medina just means old city, and presumably every Arab city has one. I have no idea how much of this one we saw, but it was plenty. Much of it was small shops, many catering to tourists but many not. We quickly decided it was time for lunch, and we looked for someplace to eat. Plenty of restaurants were there, but many of them were not open. We seemed to have a knack for wanting to eat at times when places were closed. We did find one that was open, however, with tables both inside (not air-conditioned) and out. We sat outside and ordered. This was easy, as they had only two choices: fish or chicken (which they called turkey and may in fact have been that). I chose the fowl, whatever it was, and it was very good. Boneless and lightly spiced, served with French fries, a sauce, and a sunny-side-up fried egg.



Tunis Medina, from Web 2025

From there we set out with a guide to see more of the Medina and do a little shopping. It was interesting and sometimes beautiful. There were many beautifully decorated doors. We went into a couple of buildings, including a carpet store, where we could see the interior and go to the roof to view the city. In the carpet store, the owner unrolled at least a dozen carpets for us to look at, as we sat comfortably along the side of a room. We didn't buy.

At one point, our guide's phone rang. It was the restaurant asking if I'd left a bag there. I had, and we went back to get it after our tour was over. I tried to tip the man at the restaurant, as well as thanking him, but he wouldn't accept it. What I had in the bag

wasn't worth much, but it was a nice contrast to Paris. It's my impression that we had found the guide some distance from the restaurant, so I was surprised that the owner of the restaurant had known whom to call. I guess it's a smaller community than it looks.

In the evening, we were picked up by Rafa and his father who drove us to their home for dinner. The father, who speaks little English but is very nice, is head of the Tunis fishing port. Their home, which is located at the port, is presumably provided with his job, and it is nice but modest. Rafa's mom had made dinner, with help from Rafa: fresh whole shrimp, a whole sea bass apiece, salad, something spicy that Barbara particularly likes, bricks, lasagna, and fresh fruit for desert – wonderful melon, grapes, plums, & peaches. I ate a lot.

Oh yes, "bricks." Barbara had told me about these, which are very popular here. On menus they are sometimes "briks" or "brika". They are most similar to quesadillas. A large round flat bread, very thin, is layered with cheese and/or tuna, folded in half and cooked. The ones served here at Rafa's were cut into pie-shaped wedges, but in a restaurant, you got the whole thing, not cut. I loved them.



Tunisian brik, from Web 2025

Oddly, given what his father does for a living, Rafa does not eat seafood at all. I, on the other hand, was becoming more adept at eating fish than before, as I watched carefully how Rafa's father ate his. Done right, it can be delicious.

After we left there and were driven back to the hotel, we both wanted to retire early. But Barbara was persuaded, in a phone call from another of her participants, to meet her at Sidi Bou Said for coffee. That required a longish drive and search for parking, followed by a wait for the friend. But it was very pleasant, even though it was 12:30 by the time we got back to the hotel.

Sunday, August 3

We had breakfast away from the hotel for a change, at Café Journal, the theme of which was newspapers, with a menu that looked like one. We were joined there first by a woman Amira, another of Barbara's participants, and later also by a young man, Dali (short for Mohamed Ali), and his girlfriend Hejer. Dali was the brother of one of Barbara's participants who is currently in the US. He was just college-age himself, and his girlfriend seemed even younger. She was very pretty in a very sexy way, hidden behind large gold reflecting sunglasses. She said little, mostly looked bored, and snuggled up with Dali.

For breakfast I had a croissant, an egg, and coffee, plus juice. They didn't have orange juice, which we were told was out of season (although I'd had it every day at the hotel). I chose banana juice, which wasn't as good as I expected. Should have chosen peach.

We all drove (in two cars) again to Sidi Bou Said where we had drinks in a café overlooking the sea. I also ordered a brick, which was much larger than I'd expected based on what I'd had before, so I shared it with others. I think it was while we were there that a woman appeared and began painting a design on the back of Barbara's hand and wrist. It reminded me of the designs done in India with henna, but this was very black, and Barbara wondered if it would wash off. I don't think it did. The design was pretty.

We then went to the Roman amphitheater, near the ruins that we'd seen before. This was a half-circle of stone (or maybe cement) seats that is still used today for concerts. We also went to a museum near the cathedral, which also had Roman artifacts, though not nearly as nice or as well presented as what we'd seen at the Bordo Museum.



Roman amphitheater, from Web 2025

As we went from place to place, I rode in the front passenger seat of the car with Dali driving. When I first tried to put on my seatbelt, I found that the receptacle for it – the shorter part of the belt – was blocked with a piece of plastic. Dali showed me that I just needed to push the button to release it, as you would the belt itself, and remove it so that I could buckle the belt. What's that about? The car has a beeper that signals if someone doesn't have their seatbelt buckled. This fools it, so you can ride and drive without using the seatbelt and being bothered by the noise. I wonder if those are available in the US.

Once, as we were walking through the streets, our group stopped once to help Hejer with her sunglasses. It seems she had gotten them tangled with her hair and couldn't get them loose.

We all ate lunch at a restaurant called Tam Tam. It was very modern, and we got a booth for five inside. Typical of restaurants we'd been in, this one provided bread and several little dishes of sauce to spread on it before we even ordered. One of those spreads is Harissa, a concoction of olive oil and peppers that Barbara loves and that seems to be everywhere. It was too hot for me, but I liked the other spreads, one with chopped olives and others with cream and/or cheese. We also started by sharing a very thin-crust pizza that had thin slices of salmon and a white sauce. Delicious.

For lunch I ordered "couscous au poisson," since I'd heard couscous mentioned frequently but hadn't tried it. Poisson turns out to be fish, and in this case it was, again, sea bass. Good thing that I'd learned how to eat it. The couscous was ok, but not

something I'd go out of my way to have again. Kind of dry, despite the sauce that came with it.

By the time I was done eating, I noticed that the conversation had died down, and everyone else was using their phones in one way or another. Nobody was talking on their phones of course. Just texting, I suppose. So, I too pulled out my iPhone and did something with it. I don't recall what; perhaps I read The Economist.

After taking a break back at the hotel, Barbara and I took a taxi to the home of Hela, another of her participants, where we met Hela's husband and her 6-week-old son. Several other participants also stopped by to see Hela and especially to see and say goodbye to Barbara, since she would be leaving early the next day.

Hela's home was a very nice apartment on the 4th floor of a tallish building in a busy neighborhood of such buildings. I'd thought we were going there for dinner, but instead we just had snacks – nuts and such.

Both then and the previous evening at the other home, a large TV was close to where we sat and was turned on the whole time with the sound on. Barbara and I talked about it afterwards, as we both found it strange and rather irritating, since it interfered with conversation. We asked Anise about it, as he drove us back to our hotel, but I don't think we really got an explanation. He didn't seem to see it as standard practice, but he also didn't find it odd. On the other hand, in contrast to our lunch that afternoon, nobody at this gathering ever took out their phones, except to answer calls.

Barbara was to leave the next morning on the 6:45 AM flight – same as I would on Wednesday. Rafa and his father had insisted on taking her to the airport, although that would mean picking her up at 4:00 AM, and their leaving their home much earlier. Barbara tried her best to say no to that, and she ordered a taxi. But late that evening she got a text saying that they would have to pick her up, as Rafa's mom had bought a package of brick wrappers for her. So, she was forced to give in, apparently. I hoped they wouldn't offer the same for me, as I'd much rather order a taxi, with the hotel to follow up if needed, than to wait for them to arrive, quite possibly late. I think I'm safe, as they don't have anything like the affection for me that they have for Barbara.

Monday, August 4

Leila said she'd collect me between 10 and 12, so I set my alarm for 8:00 and hit snooze until almost 8:45. When I did get up, I saw that she had texted me at 7:45 that she'd be there in one hour. Oops. She'd had a change of plans. I quickly showered and went down for breakfast, and she joined me part way through.

We drove to TBS – the Tunis Business School – which is where she works and which will be the base for the program of her WTO Chair.

TBS is quite far from the hotel, as far south of the city center as the hotel is north. It's

also, as she explained beforehand, in a much less nice neighborhood. The area is sparsely and poorly populated, with some industry. The building, which is quite new and nice, was built for another school that then refused to relocate to it. When TBS – a US-style English-language business school that is just 4 years old – was created it was able to move right in.

I met first with the Dean, and then with Leila and two more of her researchers. We had a good discussion of the program, and I believe that I gave them some useful suggestions that they hadn't thought of.

Afterwards, by which time it was after 2:00, we drove back closer to the hotel for lunch.

In our conversation, Leila mentioned that she and others have multiple roles with multiple schools and institutions. As a result, they waste lots of time traveling among them. I believe it. We spent time just getting to the school, and then to lunch. By the time I got back to the hotel, after just two meetings and a lunch, it was 5:00PM. Imagine if we had started as late as originally planned.

Back at the hotel for the evening, I put on my swimsuit and took a dip, first in the sea and then in the pool. Both were comfortably warm. I went in the pool mainly to get the sand off my body and the taste of salt out of my mouth. I also walked through the facilities of the hotel's spa, which included many options such as the local version of sauna. But none of it appealed to me. I ate dinner in the main restaurant, sitting outside and finding it pleasantly cool. Days are very hot, but evenings are wonderful.

Tuesday, August 5

Leila took me to meet with Mustapha Kamel Nabli. He is an economist who worked for years at the World Bank, then had several other positions and returned to Tunisia after the revolution where he has been involved in politics. Right now, he heads a small organization, the North Africa Bureau of Economic Studies, which includes a group that Leila is part of. He knows my friends Bernard Hoekman, Carolyn Freund, and others.

A few days previously he announced his interest in running for President of Tunisia in the election this fall. Leila says he will not win, but that this may result in his becoming Prime Minister. That would be neat. I've never met a Prime Minister, but I met one other person who later became Prime Minister (of India).

We met for close to one hour, discussing issues of trade and economic policy. He seems like a decent guy. He recalls the work that Bob Stern and I did on Tunisia.

Curcuma: a spice that Leila says is good for depression. You sprinkle it on food after it is cooked. (I don't know where this fits into this conversation, but it's in my notes.)

After our meeting, Leila and I went shopping in La Marsa for gifts, with more success than either of us expected. We then tried to go for lunch at the same restaurant on the sea

that we'd failed to find open on Friday. It doesn't serve until 4:00, so we failed again and went again to a restaurant – the same one as before – up the street. I had a brick and fries; very good.

Back at the hotel, I suggested we use the computer in the business center to look at course materials. I couldn't access UM's archive of syllabi, for some reason, but she found my own online course materials useful. I promised to send her things from other Econ courses once I got home.

We said goodbye at 3:00, and I rested from then on, planning to get to bed very early since I'd need to be up early for my flight. Leila offered to drive me to the airport, but I persuaded her that I'd genuinely rather use a taxi.

I went to the Breeze restaurant for dinner at 6:30. It was very pleasant, not hot, and there was a nice breeze, on a terrace just feet from the shore. But when I asked for a menu, I was told that kitchen opens only at 7:00. I had a beer while I waited.

Wednesday, August 6

Headed home, I hoped. Check-out and taxi were easy. At the airport, a man appeared to take my bag, though since it's just a carry-on, I thought that hardly necessary. On the other hand, I had some spare change in dinars, so why not. It turned out to be convenient, since I usually waste time and effort trying to figure out where to go to check in when I'm at an unfamiliar airport. He took me there directly.

Check-in was briefly problematic, as our change last week meant that I had a new ticket that did not show in the system. The woman at the check-in counter didn't know what to do and called her supervisor. He understood the situation, but said I'd need to wait 15 minutes for the ticket counter to open to get my ticket. I waited, but before I reached the front of the line at the ticket counter, he came over and processed me himself at the check-in counter. I was fine.

The only other slight problem was at immigration, where the officer was apparently confused by my new passport and called over a supervisor to reassure him.

In Paris, at Charles De Gaulle airport where I would spend 2½ hours between flights, I was looking forward to using the lounge. I had, of course, lost my membership card and my Delta diamond card along with everything else, but I hoped that my diamond status printed on the boarding pass would be sufficient to get me in. It was. No problem.

But Air France was remodeling its lounge, so I was directed instead to a "pop up lounge." This had minimal services and minimal comfort. The furniture was all metal, for example, no upholstery.

I looked for coffee. There were paper cups labeled with coffee brands (I took Nescafé)

and canisters of hot water, so I figured it would be only instant coffee. But while I found tea, I couldn't find coffee, and I had to ask. With patience, the attendant showed what I hadn't noticed about the paper cup: It had a tab sticking up at the rim. Pull the tab and a false bottom is removed, under which is instant coffee. Clever.

Not so clever is that they built this temporary lounge without any electrical outlets. To charge my phone, I had to leave the lounge and go to the boarding gate. There, fortunately, the nicely padded seats have outlets at the end of each row. Overall, the temporary lounge is worse in many ways than the regular terminal.

It's a very big airport, but in spite of that, my flight did not board through a jetway. We took a bus that traveled a remarkable distance to the plane. Then, even though the plane was parked in a large open area, the bus stopped some forty feet from the stairs that led up to the door of the plane, and we all had to walk that distance, in the rain, to board. I gather that there are some people who like Air France, the French people, and the country. I certainly have not learned why on this trip.

Well maybe the food. The meal on this flight was certainly better than I've usually gotten on Delta.

Once I figured out how to do it, I reluctantly watched a movie, Twelve Years a Slave. Reluctantly, because I didn't really feel up for such a downer of a movie. But I got very much involved in it, albeit that I was wishing that the 12 years would end. They did, of course, and when Solomon was reunited with his family, I found myself more choked up than I have been for many years, by a movie or otherwise.