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Tunisia's superyacht revolution

KEY FACTS

Facilities

- ▶ Number of berths for 70m-110m yachts: 11
- ▶ Number of berths for 35m-70m yachts: 31
- ▶ Harbour area: 350,000m²
- ▶ Population of Bizerte: 580,000
- ▶ Nearest international airport: Tunis

Distances from Marina Bizerte to:

- ▶ Athens: 768nm
- ▶ Capri: 281nm
- ▶ Ibiza: 412nm
- ▶ Kotor: 681nm
- ▶ Lipari Islands: 251nm
- ▶ Monaco: 426nm
- ▶ Porto Cervo: 234nm
- ▶ Rome: 289nm
- ▶ Sardinia: 110nm
- ▶ Sicily: 130nm



Tunisia's Marina Bizerte has been strategically located to attract superyachts moving out of Malta

TUNISIA IS ABOUT TO BECOME A VIABLE MEDITERRANEAN ALTERNATIVE FOR OWNERS SEEKING A SECURE HOME PORT

FRANCES & MICHAEL HOWORTH REPORT

OPPORTUNITY BECKONED FOR

Tunisia when Malta entered the Eurozone in 2008, and was forced to surrender its status as the Mediterranean's top superyacht tax haven.

Captain's mourned the loss of Malta's low fuel prices and lamented the sharp rise in labour costs as Malta finally switched currency to the Euro.

The added encumbrance of strict European legislation forced some superyacht owners to seek an alternative, safe and secure port for over-wintering, and its close proximity to the traditional cruising grounds of the Cote d'Azur, Tunisia

experienced a sudden surge in superyacht demand.

Tunisia's authorities and businesses quickly realised that investment in modern superyacht facilities would allow the country to pick up lucrative revenue from the seriously damaged Maltese superyacht market.

Popular uprising

Facilities along the north coast of Tunisia began to spruce themselves up for the anticipated superyacht invasion. And, just as they began to market their services, Tunisia became the

first country in North Africa to succumb to the popular uprising that would eventually spread across the region — the Arab Spring.

Order was eventually restored within a few weeks and security returned to acceptable levels a couple of months later.

"It was a remarkable time," says Tim Morley, CEO of Morley Yachts who relocated his company from Antibes in France to Sidi Bou Said in Tunisia in 2009 to take advantage of the impending superyacht boom.

"Ordinary people came

Attractive tax incentives have been put in place to encourage foreigners to set up business in Tunisia

together and took over the job of defending their local areas and businesses from looters, and thanks to the actions of the army general — and the will of the people — the damage was minimal.”

Morley says that his friends in the industry were surprised by his move to Tunisia.

“When I discovered the Marina Bizerte project in 2008, I knew it was the kind of opportunity I had been looking for. Shortly after moving the business to the marina, Morley Yachts was appointed as central agent for berth sales.”

At the time, construction of the complex hadn't actually started. Morley knew that given the location — just south of the southern tip of Sardinia — and the fact that Tunisia lay outside the EU, the marina would in time attract many yachts.

Morley fell in love with the

Joint venture

With the new marina complex now moving towards completion, Bizerte is about to change out of all recognition, as service providers and yacht maintenance companies begin to set up shop.

The development of the 800 berth Marina Bizerte is a joint venture between Belgian construction company CFE and Bizerte Cap 3000, a local development company.

Christophe Lacote, marketing director of Marina Bizerte, is a passionate proponent of Bizerte's future as a true superyacht port.

“Unlike some projects that offer a marina as a catalyst to attract buyers into a real estate development, Marina Bizerte is first and foremost about yachts,” says Lacote.

“The modern apartments being built next to the marina are there to support the marina, not the other way around.”

Improved infrastructure

Tunisians are proud of their people's revolution, and are making huge efforts to communicate to the world that

Tunisia now better than before in social and business terms.

Perceptions of Tunisia within the superyacht business are still cautious but, with diesel fuel at 50cents per litre, skilled labour at €2 per hour, and 80m (262ft) berths for sale at €3.2m, Tunisia is about to give Mediterranean Europe a run for its money.

Shipyards operating in Bizerte are already attracting business from superyachts.

W Magic Shipyard, located less than a mile from Marina Bizerte along the channel leading into the Lac de Bizerte, lies in an Economic Park whose residents are exonerated from charging tax.

Production manager, Sami Ben Brahim, is the person

IN BRIEF MARINA BIZERTE

BIZERTE'S importance as a strategic port dates back 3,000 years and the town's modern history as a French Protectorate is evident in the wide streets built next to the densely populated old town.

It was the French who created a deep-water channel to the 60km² Lac de Bizerte which lies behind the city.

Built in 1902, its outer sea walls have protected the port for 100 years and the basin now being developed is well proven as a provider of shelter in all conditions.

“We're lucky that the effect of the few centimetres of tide sets up a current in the channel leading to the lake. This circulates the water in the marina basin keeping

it clean,” explains Marina Bizerte's marketing manager Christophe Lacote. “New concrete pontoons are being built on tubular steel piles to allow effective circulation of seawater.

“We have no doubt that superyachts will come and spend time in Bizerte once there are good facilities to cater for their needs.

“Everyone is working hard to ensure we have the right network of people involved in the lead up to the marina's opening later this year.”

Ezzeddine Mhedhebi, a local lawyer, adds that: “Attractive tax incentives have been put in place to encourage foreigners are able to set up business in Tunisia.”



Tim Morley of Morley Yachts believes the future looks bright for Tunisian superyachting

charm of the country and appreciated the quality of life local people enjoyed.

He recognised that superyacht crew would be happy to spend lay-over time there once the port development was completed.

“People weren't able to see Tunisia as a true superyacht destination until very recently,” he explains.

“Yachts called at Bizerte for fuel and crew enjoyed the walk over to see the picturesque Phoenician old-port. But a lack of facilities meant that it was never a place where they would have considered staying longer than a couple of days.”



Marina Bizerte will have 800 berths when completed

tasked with overseeing the construction of Wally Tenders, of which 50 have been built by the facility. The yard has the potential to build, refit and repair yachts from 40m-45m (131ft-148ft).

It was contracted to build all of the Wally 80 sailing yachts, and more recently the Wally 47.

Pisa and Baglietto yachts

have also been built within the same complex.

The yard is adept at working with composite materials, and is equipped with giant ovens that can take 30m (98ft) moulds. They are experienced at working with pre-preg carbon and vacuum infusion of epoxy resin with PVC or super light nomex cores. **SB**