



*Potter shaping an Amphorae*

# JERBA *Island of Tranquility*

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Jerba invites relaxation and tranquility coupled with a seaside beach which has high grade hotels, water sports, calm seas and dramatically blue skies, in season. The photographer heading for Tunisia won't want to miss Jerba with its vast tourist zone with safe beaches on the east coast, but when settled in comfortable surroundings one forgets that there

is a lot more to offer. The villages are widely scattered with lime-washed, low lying houses with their traditional blue doors found among the olive trees, figs and palms. The setting makes for good photography as each house has its own door ornament and pattern, but beware, because of the brightness of the houses on sunny days one has to consider using a filter to obtain some form of detail in the architecture. By using a polarizer filter to darken the azure sky, the results are more dramatic.

The island is scarcely more the 24 miles at its widest and it is flat. Because of its turbulent history over the centuries, the island's population is remarkably mixed with Moslems, Arabic, and Berber languages, plus Jews, and black Africans from the South. This mixed community makes for easy an relationship with the locals and easy to photograph.

When visiting Jerba, plan to allow time to explore the island by taxi which can be arranged through the hotel and will find it cheap to hire and one needs only a half day because the Island is relatively small. The main town is Houmt Souk which invites leisurely exploration with an old-



*Ancient ceramic tiles*



*Fish Auction in Houmt Souk*

fashioned atmosphere, with many of the women still wearing the island's native attire. It is made of white cloth trimmed in orange and topped by a broad-brimmed straw hat. Visit the Souk with its old fondouks (inns) used by ancient camel drivers for rest holes, where Jerba moko (cafes) only serve tea, coffee and soft drinks. In the Souk one finds shops selling long strings of red peppers and other spices with aromas filling the lanes with their scent. Do not miss the morning fish auction where an



*Jerba pensioner*



*Preparing a Zriba  
(octopus trap)*



*Guellala Pottery*

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auctioneer presides from a chair set on a table. With a red checha stuck firmly on his head, he calls up bids for the small fish displayed in a little festoon. Also in the Souk one can find bargains like jewelry, leather-work and wickerwork. While in the area, visit the local harbor where one will see endless earthen fish traps called Zriba which make excellent photographs (with the correct lighting) as they stack up against the walls of the buildings. If it is lunchtime, visit one of the many restaurants which will serve up a variety of fish, generally grilled.

At Guellala, a small town where pottery is made, the undecorated jars and amphorae are a local speciality, as they are essential pottery for the housewife and fishermen. A visit to one of these workshops (half underground) which in ancient times were caves where pottery was stored and the olive-oil presses worked while the potter's skillful hands continue their traditional craft, shaping the plain pottery which will be fired after drying. In this location there are many opportunities for photography (using flash) of the various shapes as well as of the interior of the cave arches which are said to date from Roman times.

Jerba is connected to the mainland by car ferry and an ancient Roman causeway of approximately 4.5 miles long. The causeway is referred to as the Island's umbilical cord linking El Kantara with the mainland. The Romans called the causeway the Pons Zita and it was used to link trading posts but as years passed it disappeared leaving only a ford used

by camel-drivers who called it Camel Way. The new road was built in 1951 with a bridge halfway across to allow small boats to pass. (Adjacent to this causeway is an enormous and unattractive pipe which brings drinking water to the Island inhabitants from the mainland). Before leaving Jerba and the relaxation of the beaches on the East coast, one should take the opportunity of visiting the Theme Park at Djerba. Locate the Aghir road, pack your camera and a supply of both monochrome and color film or plenty of digital media as the subjects illustrate Jerba history and way of life. This park has numerous activities and workshops like Djerban handicrafts and customs, plus the Houch House with its decorations, weavers, under-ground oil-mill, lathes for woodwork, kilns for pottery, as well as the dromedary mounting a slope to a well, pulling up full buckets of water. The new museum should not be missed with its treasure house of Roman and Islamic art, which can be photographed upon permission.

Jerba Island is certainly a great place to relax as there is not much more to do except to visit one of the exquisite fish restaurants in the harbor area of Houmt Souk. Photography can be simple as subjects do not require special handling: take a camera of your choice and a small telephoto lens (maximum 300mm), portrait lens (85mm), wide-angle lens (24mm) and a polarizer filter to take scenes of architecture and beaches.

**Jerba is a photographer's dream spot.** 📷