

The Touristic Investment of French Colonialism in the Ziban Region: A Case Study in Recreational Tourism

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Abstract:

The Ziban region has captivated foreign tourists, adventurers, and explorers as the gateway to the Algerian Sahara, being its first entry point. For numerous individuals, it has served as a destination for exploration and travel, especially during the winter season. These travels had diverse purposes, each according to the traveler's role. The colonial administration was keen on establishing a network of land routes, aiming to open avenues for touristic investment in the region.

Key words: Biskra, Tourism, French colonization, Algerian Sahara, Investment.

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Introduction

A significant number of travelers and orientalists flocked to Biskra, undertaking enjoyable experiences that many found unforgettable. These journeys had various purposes, each according to the traveler's role, and comprised researchers, archaeologists, tourists, traders, doctors, missionaries, and even some who functioned as spies. These travelers conducted studies on the region, familiarized themselves with its conditions, and produced reports about it. Their writings varied based on their objectives; some were fair and neutral, marked by objectivity, while others were influenced by religious bias, leading to prejudiced judgments. Despite the hidden agenda, negative opinions, and unfounded allegations by some, their writings, both positive and negative, significantly contributed to the region's historical record (IDIR, 2013)

How did French colonialism exploit tourist capacities to support its economy?

1. Exploratory Journeys in the Ziban Region

Notable Western exploratory journeys to the Ziban region include:

1.1. Eugène Daumas' Exploratory Journey:

In his book "Le Sahara Algérien," (lit. The Algerian Sahara) Eugène Daumas delved into the geographical aspects, transportation routes, and desert caravans of various southern Algerian regions, including Biskra, Ghardaia, and Ouargla. He also highlighted the prominent Saharan tribes, addressing their customs and traditions (Daumas, 1845)

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1.2. Henri Duveyrier's Exploratory Journey:

Starting his journey to southern Algeria from the port of Stora (Skikda) ¹ on May 8, 1859, Henri Duveyrier traveled through Constantine and Batna, reaching Biskra on June 13 of the same year. He continued his journey, reaching El Guerrara District and then Ghardaia on June 21. Subsequently, he headed to Menaâ, then to Laghouat, and finally to the Tuat region. During this phase, Duveyrier engaged with Tuareg individuals, soliciting their support for further exploration into the desert. Regrettably, this journey proved unsuccessful, encountering resistance from the locals. He subsequently retraced his steps, returning to Biskra in February 1860 (DICTIONARY, 1903)

During his time in Biskra, Duveyrier documented the various African tribes present, known as the "Zanj," including the Bornou, Haoussa, Bagirmi, Felala, Ouaday, Manga, Bambara, Lagone, Derge, Affade, Kouri, Maggari, Margi and Hadamoua among others (Duveyrier).

This group resided in a small neighborhood constructed from palm fronds, situated on the outskirts of orchards, near the New City. Duveyrier provided insights into their lifestyles, clothing, and described the state of the sewage left by the valleys, including various forms and types of shells. He also provided extensive details regarding the biology in these water sources (Duveyrier, p. 12).

Duveyrier also described the remnants of Roman foundations and large pipes, some still attached to the edges and carried away by water. He recounted a Roman building without doors or openings, filled with sand but in good condition, except for one or two small circular openings, possibly caused by the artillery of Salah Rais in the past. Duveyrier speculated about the possibility of hidden treasures within (Duveyrier, p. 13).

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On January 15, Duveyrier, accompanied by Mr. Columbo, visited the mineral spring Hammam Essalihin (lit. The bath of the Righteous People), to the north with a slight westward inclination. The baths surrounded a building with rooms for bathers' comfort. The saline water emitted the smell of hydrogen sulfide, with water temperatures reaching 44 degrees at the edge of the basin and boiling at 45 degrees at the source. Duveyrier mentioned that the main reason for visiting this bath was to obtain fish samples from the flowing stream.

On February 1, 1860, Henri Duveyrier left Biskra, heading to Oued Righ, then El Oued Province, and later to el-Djerid i.e., South Western Tunisia Region (Ceylan, 1973).

1.3. Dournaux Dupéré's Exploratory Journey:

Dournaux Dupéré set off from the city of Biskra heading to Touggourt in February 1874. He reached Gadamès, where his journey unveiled the commercial route connecting southern Libya to Algeria, passing through the provinces of El Oued and Biskra, ultimately reaching the market of Gadamès. This market was considered one of the largest trading markets in that period. Dupéré faced a tragic end, as the locals, suspicious of his intentions and unsettled by his presence, ultimately killed him (Schirmer, 1899)

1.4. Félix Hauttfort's Exploratory Journey:

In 1897, Félix Hauttfort visited the city of Biskra and documented his journey in the well-known book "Au Pays des palmes. Biskra," (lit. In the Land of Palms. Biskra). Hauttfort provided detailed accounts of his journey, capturing the customs and traditions observed during weddings and funerals. He portrayed the Arab men of Biskra as conservative due to their respectable and elegant attire, covering the entire body in both summer and winter (Hautfort, 1897)

Hauttfort expressed profound joy upon reaching Biskra, considering it the best reward after a strenuous and tiring travel. The charm of the oasis, the scent of amber, the clarity of its skies, and the

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towering palm trees made him forget all the challenges faced on the way.

Félix Hauttfort vividly described the beauty of Biskra's women, known as the "Nailiyet," marveling at their graceful dance, the jingling sound of their ankle bracelets during the rotations, and their silky attire.

He also discussed the urban fabric of the city, highlighting the French colonial influence in introducing a new style. The colonialists erected, near the shrine of the righteous saint Adrerrahmane Zarzour, a military tower called the Bordj al-Turk (lit. Turkish Tower). Additionally, a church was built, featuring a large clock on its dome indicating time, connected to a bell. Hauttfort compared the city to a chess game, with straight streets and white surfaces i.e., typical European quarter: modest shops, followed by beautiful and luxurious residences with an architectural style reminiscent of Andalusia. The municipal headquarters, dealing with civil and legislative matters, was described. Hauttfort then delved into the description of the market, portraying various scenes, such as a small merchant under the arches, a café and an adjacent restaurant offering popular dishes for the poor or the weak. Elsewhere, It is the scent of spices mingling with leather and paint. They are the Beni Mezab from the families of Bakouche Abdallah or Bakouche Mohammed, who came to build their wealth. As for the Beni Mezab, they monopolize woven fabrics, caftans and haik. Not far from this location, one can find a barber or someone who extracts teeth (Boumaza, Biskra in the eyes of Western travelers) (Dentistry nowadays).

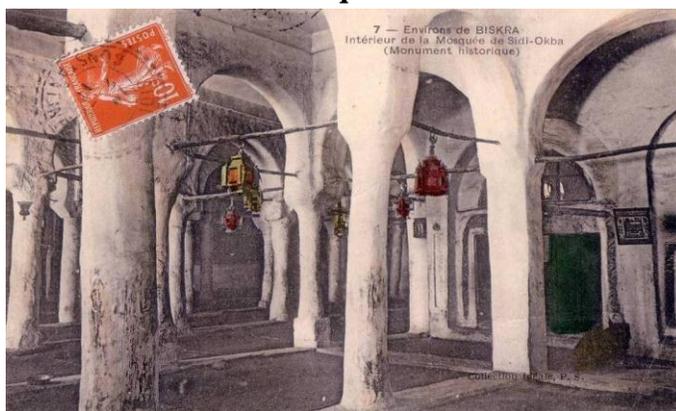
1.5. Marcaillhou d'Aymeric and Georges Hirtz Exploratory Journey:

The joint journey of J. Marcio D'Americo and George Hertz to Biskra resulted in the publication of the book titled "Biskra: Les Ziban." (lit. Biskra: The Ziban). The journey began at El Kantara, where the spectacular view of its rocks and violet mountains captivated them (d'Aymeric & Georges, 1954).

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The authors commenced their exploratory journey from the city of Biskra, passing by the shrine of Sidi Zarzour and the Landon Garden. On their way to the city center, they provided a detailed description of its old neighborhoods: M'cid, Bordj al-Turk, Kadasha, and more. They also mentioned some cafes, such as the Seksaf Café. The two travelers visited the Ziban oases, including Tolga, Bouchagroun, Lichana, Farfar, Foughala, Lioua, and El Bordj. The travelers have lauded Deglet Nour, considering it globally superior, describing it as thick, translucent light color, exceptionally delectable, and of a rare quality. They also admired the Ottoman corner of Sidi Ali Ben Omar and expressed great admiration for the oasis of Sidi Okba and its mosque (d'Aymeric & Georges, 1954, p. 6).

Picture 1 mosque Sidi Okba



The captivating nature of the Ziban region and its suitable climate have attracted numerous European tourists, making Biskra a distinguished locale for tourism exploration where Europeans come to spend their holidays or seek therapeutic benefits.

In 1932, Biskra witnessed its first development plan called "Plan Dervaux." This plan aimed to link the European city with the original city to reorganize it and enhance its tourist attraction. The plan included the establishment of a large public park, golf courses, a spa resort, casinos, hotels, the preservation of Roman ruins, and

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designated areas for hunting and racing, among other initiatives (Djamel, 1999).

Biskra has become a preferred tourist destination for visitors from various nationalities, including English, Swedish, Dutch, American, Spanish, Italian, Maltese, Norwegian, and German. The scenic oases have played a significant role in shaping Biskra into a tourism hub par excellence (IDIR, 2013, p. 66).

2. Recreational Tourism

2.1. Hunting:

Hunting is an ancient profession that represents a craft and a source of livelihood for many. However, it has become a hobby for some in their leisure time, allowing them to enjoy the fresh air, contemplate nature, and escape the pressures of work for recreational purposes.

Recreational hunting was initially limited to rulers and nobility in ancient civilizations. However, the Roman civilization considered this type of sport inappropriate for the ruling class. It's noteworthy that both genders practiced this sport, and over time, the means of hunting evolved, incorporating firearms and trained dogs. As a result, the number of hunted animals increased, leading to the necessity of agreements to regulate and control hunting activities.

In the Ziban region, the hunting area extended over a 20-kilometer radius east and west of the city of Biskra. The preferred hunting season for tourists was typically from late February to March. Stone tools were often used for hunting, while other means such as spears and rifles were avoided (Knight, 1998).

Hunting attracted significant interest from tourists, especially the French, in Biskra. In 1899, Jean Hurabielle mentioned that hunting in the northern part of Biskra, near El Outaya area along the valley, was known for wild pigeons, motivating tourists to engage in hunting.

In the northern part of Biskra, approximately 10 kilometers away, hunting of starlings became renowned. These birds caused significant losses to the crops of local farmers, leading the French administration to organize special hunting trips to reduce annual losses. The local

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residents viewed this as a great pleasure, akin to preventing the birds from consuming their crops.

In the eastern Ziban region, hunting of Barbary stag became well-known, while the Ahmar Khaddou Aures and Djemina regions gained fame for hunting eagles and falcons. The region of Ain Naga became renowned for hunting gazelles, and Sidi Okba for capturing migratory pigeons.

The western Ziban region became renowned for hunting hawks and gazelles in Ras El Miaad area. The southern region of Biskra became renowned for ostrich hunting in the area now known as Bir Nam.

Biskra itself saw the hunting of foxes, jackals, and hyenas in Ain El Hamia region, utilizing hunting dogs for their fur, while the area was also known for hunting various bird species such as crows, hoopoes, and owls. In the Eastern oasis, hunting of Goldfinch was known in Filiach oasis (Hurabielle, 1898).

2.2. Horse Racing Tradition :

Horse racing, or equestrianism, owes its origin to the Roman Empire. The style of racing, distances, and types of horses vary significantly from one region to another. Besides the competitive aspect, there are also prizes distributed to the winners at the end of the races. Additionally, gambling and betting were practices associated with certain races, especially those overseen by the Jewish community (Horace, 2012).

In Biskra, horse racing gained significant prominence, taking place at various locations, including Beni Morah, Janan Baylek, and Djebel el Course. These events attracted numerous political, military, and even religious figures. An example is the horse race organized by Cardinal Charles Martial Lavigerie in 1890, which was part of his missionary project in the region. These races included not only horse races but also sword fighting, spear throwing, cycling, running, tug of war, and jumping.

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Since the early days of racing, the French colonial administration implemented measures such as setting the number of laps, distances, scheduling, prizes, and entry fees to ensure public interest. Over time, these races evolved into a three-day festival, characterized by the integration of local folklore, giving them a unique and distinctive flavor. The local population's attendance at these events was notably high (Museum, 1932).

The races were initially scheduled for late January, but they eventually extended into early spring due to the significant profits generated for the colonial administration. It is crucial to note the negative aspects of these races, which relied on gambling, contributing to the economic decline of the population due to their fascination with this sport.

The races were typically divided into laps. The first day featured long-distance races, covering skills, speed, and endurance for both horses and riders, starting from Biskra and heading towards Ouargla. Supporters lined up along the connecting road to cheer on the participants. The second day hosted a steeplechase race on Djebel el Course, where riders competed in a circular track. The race concluded with a joyous celebration, including the crowning of winners. This type of race appealed greatly to foreign tourists (S, 2009).

Picture2 racing field



The final day focused on the competition for the selection of the most beautiful horse, held in Janan Baylek. Various breeds, including

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Arabian, Barbary, and crossbreeds, were allowed to participate. The winning horse received a medal and cash prizes, and this event often continued into the evening. To conclude the day, approximately ten races were held, testing the riders' skills. Falcons were released, and riders had to chase and capture them while on horseback. Valuable prizes were awarded to the winners, and many locals attended these competitions to improve their economic conditions.

Picture3 racing field



2.3. Oral Heritage

❖ Definition and types:

Richard Dorson defines oral heritage as "everything left to us by our ancestors in terms of knowledge, customs, sciences, techniques, religious and spiritual experiences, political and organizational practices based on oral memory for preservation, deciphering the past and acquainting ourselves with the significant events that have been documented and preserved." He further describes it as "a spontaneous means through which a people express themselves freely without any restrictions, as it is the natural and sincere expression of a nation's dreams, hopes, ambitions, miseries, and hardships (Dorson, *Theories of Contemporary Folklore*)

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Heritage is divided into two types: tangible heritage, encompassing ancient civilizational artifacts (archaeological remains), and intangible heritage, also known as oral heritage, including myths, stories, folk games, riddles, jokes, proverbs, sayings, and more (htt1).

The fields covered by oral heritage include everything that is transmitted orally or expressed kinetically, such as languages, dialects, customs, traditions, rituals, beliefs, celebrations, holidays, games, puzzles, proverbs, folk tales, poetry, singing, performing arts, and folk dances (Dorson, Theories of Contemporary Folklore)

Oral heritage encompasses the entirety of what has been passed down through generations. It is a historical and aesthetic document, marking the culmination of mature experiences of the human race throughout the ages. It is a link between the past and contemporary generations, representing the rich legacy of their ancestors, achieving human and social communication indirectly (Sargama, 2011).

❖ **Importance of Oral Heritage:**

Oral heritage has become a crucial factor in preserving cultural assets in the face of increasing globalization. Its importance lies not only in its cultural aspect but also in the rich knowledge and skills passed down through generations. The historical value embedded in the transmission of knowledge and events relevant to individuals and communities is paramount (Sargama, 2011).

2.4. Dance

Dance is a term encompassing the body language and movement, and is considered one of the most important folk arts. It is a cultural heritage shared by societies, transcending cultural differences, traditions, and customs. Dance serves as a means of expression, originating from the collective memory of a society, reflecting its aspirations and thought processes (Duwas, 2007/2008). In the Ziban region, some notable dances include the **Belly Dancing** which is performed during celebrations and special occasions, and is considered a form of mimetic art. It involves body movements, and

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the Nailiyet women in Biskra are particularly renowned for this type of dance (Varieh, 2014).

2.5. Fantasia:

Fantasia is one of the most famous arts in North Africa. It involves a performance by horsemen showcasing their skills with swords and firearms in front of an audience. Fantasia is organized during wedding celebrations, births, religious holidays, or to welcome dignitaries. It is accompanied by music, drumming, and playing the zurna (Eberhardt) (a woodwind instrument used to play folk music).

Picture4 Arab celebration



During the celebration of the Ziban Bride or the Spring Festival, clans gather from different regions. Each clan is guided by a leader carrying his flag at the front. The guests, and strangers follow behind. Under the tunes of zurna, drums and women's trilling of joys, the procession begins with individual displays, showcasing the rider's combat skills while holding a firearm, standing on horseback without falling or stumbling. Afterward, individual and daring movements are demonstrated. The procession then gathers, and the scene becomes obscured by smoke from gunshots. When this display concludes, the leader signals the start of falcon and rabbit hunting. The festivities

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continue until the end of the day (Hautfort, In the Land of Palms: Biskra, 1897).

Pictur 5 Fantasia



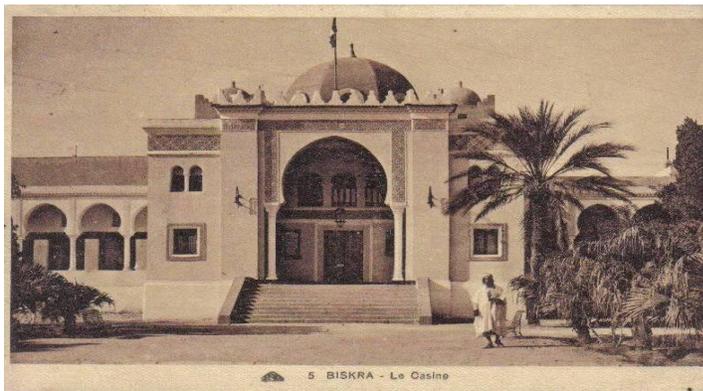
2.6. Casino (Casino de Biskra):

The first casino in Algeria was established during the French colonial period in Biskra as a result of the initiative undertaken by the Biskra and Oued Righ Association. It was constructed in a Moroccan architectural style by architect Albert Ballu between 1892-1898, with construction undertaken by Rodari. During the colonial era, the casino was owned by the Aïoun brothers, who were Jewish. It offered gambling services.

The casino reached its peak of popularity between 1901 and 1910, attracting European princes and princesses. However, due to World Wars I and II, the activity of the games held there slowed down. The Aïoun brothers applied for a license to engage in dice and round table games, receiving approval from the General Governor in 1946 (Belhi).

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Pictur 6 Casino of Biskra



2.7. Cinema:

Managed by the casino administration, the cinema in Biskra started its operations in 1903, overseen by David Adriyen and Abraham Adolf. The cinema received permission from the General Governor in 1951 to enter into a partnership with film producers, allowing films shown in the casino cinema to be screened before those in Algerian and French cinemas. (Belhi, pp. 152-154)

Film screenings took place outdoors in the square next to the casino building, restricting lower-income individuals, especially the Biskra residents, from watching these works. This led the Benguenna family to establish Le Rex cinema specifically for the Biskra community. Another cinema existed at the Grand Café Glacier, located on Cardinal Lavigerie Street beside the covered market in the center of Biskra behind the Royal inn and affiliated with al-Wahat hotel (Benjamin, Biskra: Spells of an Oasis, 2016)

Pictur7 A newspaper Le coup de bambou talking about tourism in Biskra

Le coup de bamboo N56 24/11/1934

DEUXIEME ANNEE. — N° 55 / DIMANCHE 31 NOVEMBRE 1934 0.50

LE COUP DE BAMBOU

Organe Politique, Satirique et Antineurasthénique
Paraissant tous les Dimanches en la Reine
Directeur-Gérant: A. L. SAFER, Place Béchu, Biskra
« LE COUP DE BAMBOU » est désigné pour l'insertion des annonces légales et judiciaires.

Les gestes qui comptent

Le 2 novembre dernier, jour de la Toussaint, un jour que les morts attendent pour communiquer avec les morts de la terre, a été marqué, à Biskra, par un beau geste de la part d'un grand soldat français, le capitaine Issaurat, de la 11^e compagnie du 7^e Tirailleurs Algériens, en garnison dans notre ville.

Après la cérémonie officielle au cimetière européen, le capitaine Issaurat, accompagné de tous les Officiers et Sous-Officiers, se dirigea avec une section de Tirailleurs, en tenue orientale, au cimetière musulman. Là, en présence de nombreux indigènes attirés par la curiosité, il salua les tombes de deux soldats morts au cours de l'année; tombes qu'il avait, au préalable, fait remettre en état.

Après la minute de silence respectueusement observée, il fit distribuer plusieurs boîtes de pain aux malheureux qui se trouvaient aux alentours.

Ce geste fort apprécié a été favorablement commenté en ville, et la population musulmane, qui observe tout sans rien dire, a pris bonne note en regrettant que ce geste n'ait pas été limité par les autres chefs de la garnison.

M. le capitaine Issaurat n'en est pas à son premier coup. Il ne perdit pas une occasion pour faire estimer son glorieux régiment, et c'est pourquoi la tâche de son service de recrutement est moins laborieuse. Rien ne se cache plus, tout

Le Tourisme dans la région de Biskra

Au seuil du Désert, la Reine des Ziban, parée de son collier de palmiers, vous invite à jouir de son éternel printemps.

Rien de tel pour ceux qui veulent s'évader quelques temps de l'atmosphère enfiévrée des grandes villes, où, dont le cerveau surmené, aspire au calme complet, rien de tel disons-nous, qu'un séjour d'hiver à Biskra.

Ici, l'amateur de repos et trouve, sous un climat idéal, le calme qu'il a souvent cherché en vain.

A ceux qui préfèrent les promenades et les grandes excursions, Biskra est un centre qui laisse à l'individu l'embarras du choix. Les orientalistes y trouvent également des tableaux lumineux d'une beauté puissante, des couchers de soleil impossibles à décrire. Bref, une palette de couleurs d'une richesse infinie et sans cesse renouvelée.

En un mot, pour tous — de la gaité — une vie saine et simple, c'est la devise dont Biskra s'enorgueillit : « Le Printemps tout l'hiver ».

se dit et se propage, et ce sont là des gestes qui, à eux seuls, suffisent pour faire une heureuse réclame en faveur des Tirailleurs.

Nous ne saurions trop remercier ce brillant officier qui sait se faire aimer par ses soldats et leurs parents, au grand avantage de notre patrie commune.

Ce sont là des gestes qui comptent.

L'agonie sportive

Dimanche passé, le C.C.B. remporta une nette victoire sur le C.S. Constantinois.

La population n'appréhendait pas à ce beau succès avec autant de joie qu'elle le faisait auparavant. Alors qu'une foule défilante accompagnait les joueurs du terrain en ville, en chantant et en poussant des hurrahs; cette fois-ci les joueurs rembrunirent isolément et la tôle un peu basse comme s'ils avaient essayé une défaite. La cause ?

C'est que le moral n'est pas bien fort au C.C.B. c'est que la population privée de distractions depuis fort longtemps, privée surtout de « bouif », n'a pas montré le même engagement que les années écoulées à aller encourager et applaudir les Jaune et Noir.

Et pourtant c'était une fin de mois, et pourtant nous sommes à l'époque où comme l'on dit vulgairement, il y a de l'argent en ville.

Les causes de cette défection de la population musulmane au match ? Elles ont été surabondamment exposées dans le précédent numéro du « Coup de Bamboo ».

C'est l'agonie lente, progressive mais sûre du C.C.B.

C'est bien dommage, car franchement il ne mérite pas le sort « triste » auquel son Président vient de le vouer solennellement.

Conclusion

1. The active tourism witnessed in the Ziban region, whether by tourists, foreigners, or local and Arab tourists, necessitated the organization of tourism. This led the French authorities to seek assistance from collective movements and national coordination in the tourism sector to regulate tourist activities.

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As a result, tourist facilities were established, including hotels, entertainment centers like casinos, amusement parks, resorts, baths, and more.

2. Despite the significant tourist activity in the Ziban region, the locals did not benefit from it. France worked to serve its interests and extend its influence under the guise of urbanization and tourism investment.
3. Despite the development and prosperity experienced in the tourism sector during the colonial period, it took a downturn after independence, leading to the disappearance of most tourist landmarks in the region. The remaining tourist facilities were often repurposed for different uses contrary to their initial programming.

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