

Tlemcen's cultural heritage in the service of sustainable tourism: Potentialities, obstacles, and perspectives for local development

التراث الثقافي لمدينة تلمسان في خدمة السياحة المستدامة: الإمكانيات والمعوقات وآفاق التنمية المحلية

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Received Received: 29/10/2025;

Accepted : 14/11/2025;

Published: 26/12/2025;

Abstract:

This article analyzes Tlemcen's exceptional cultural heritage and its potential for sustainable tourism through a diagnostic approach. The study highlights the region's diverse patrimonial value but identifies major obstacles to sustainability: centralized governance, poor institutional coordination, and limited community involvement. After reviewing state actions (rehabilitation, cultural circuits), the article proposes prospective avenues focused on participatory governance and heritage integration into the local economy. The conclusion asserts that Tlemcen's tourism sustainability depends on stakeholders overcoming structural constraints for a balanced valorization that promotes local development.

Keywords: Heritage; Cultural Tourism, Sustainability, Tlemcen, Local Development .

Jel Classification Codes : Z11,L83 ;Q56, O18.

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Introduction:

Sustainable tourism is now recognized as a fundamental lever for economic diversification and sustainable development. In Algeria, the sector has experienced notable growth (over 3.5 million visitors in 2024), although this dynamic remains heavily concentrated in the major metropolitan areas of the North.

However, cities with exceptional patrimonial capital, such as Tlemcen named the "Pearl of the Maghreb" struggle to position themselves as true sustainable cultural destinations. Tlemcen possesses a unique tangible (Grand Mosque, Mechouar, Mansoura) and intangible heritage (the UNESCO-classified *Chedda* since 2012, Andalusian music, craftsmanship). This contrast is reflected in low tourist flows, revealing a significant gap between patrimonial wealth and the territory's actual attractiveness.

Literature Review and Research Problem

Academic literature has extensively documented Tlemcen's tourism potential (Benkada, 2016; Kherbouche, 2019), particularly through the analysis of the outcomes of major events like "Tlemcen, Islamic Culture Capital 2011". Studies such as (ADDOUN, 2024) and (Belguidoum & Bennadji, 2018) agree that, despite significant investments in rehabilitation (using case study and project evaluation methods), these initiatives failed to create lasting tourist itineraries or ensure the necessary post-event strategic coordination. These works often highlight the critical role of vertical governance and lack of community integration (key variables) as impediments to sustainability. Our research distinguishes itself by adopting a comprehensive diagnostic approach that, beyond analyzing past projects, synthetically assesses the current structural obstacles (governance, promotion, involvement) and proposes concrete prospective strategies, addressing a gap in recent literature.

This observation leads to the following central research problem:

How can Tlemcen's exceptional cultural heritage be transformed, in the face of current structural obstacles, into an effective and sustainable lever for local development?

Research Hypotheses

To address this problem, we propose the following main and secondary hypotheses:

Main Hypothesis: The transition to sustainable cultural tourism in Tlemcen directly depends on the implementation of more participatory heritage governance and the economic integration of local communities and artisans.

1. H1: The current tourism model is constrained by structural obstacles (centralized governance and weak inter-institutional coordination) that limit the balanced valorization of heritage.
2. H2: Developing prospective strategies, including the creation of "living museums" and integrated thematic circuits, is essential to convert patrimonial capital into constant tourist attractiveness.

Article Structure

To validate these hypotheses, this article is structured around the following axes:

- The identification of Tlemcen's heritage potentialities as the foundation for cultural tourism.
- The analysis of the structural obstacles and limitations of the current tourism model.
- The examination of public strategies for valorization and the future perspectives for more inclusive and responsible tourism.

I. The Wealth and Diversity of Tlemcen's Heritage

The *wilaya* of Tlemcen has a heritage capital largely sufficient to position itself as a major pole of cultural tourism in Algeria. It is one of the oldest cities in the Algerian urban network. It is located in the extreme North-West of the country, bordered by the Mediterranean Sea to the North, the *Wilaya* of Naama to the South, that of Ain Temouchent to the East, and Morocco to the West. The city of Tlemcen, often described as the "Pearl of the Maghreb," is distinguished by its concentration of monuments that testify to its central role during the Islamic dynasties of the Maghreb.

Architectural heritage is the primary resource on which cultural tourism relies. The importance of this legacy has been amply documented in academic literature, with some authors emphasizing that this Arab-Islamic heritage represents a significant part of the Algerian architectural treasures (Kherbouche, 2019). Tlemcen occupies a strategic position (a crossroads for exchange between Tunisia, Morocco, Europe, and Africa). Its history dates back to prehistory, with an often dense web of events that have marked it. It successively bore several names, namely Pomaria (orchard), Agadir (high place), Tagrart (campment), and finally Tlemcen, a name derived from the Berber plural form *Tilimsen*, whose singular is *Tilmas*, meaning water pocket, or source (Boukerche, 1989) (BESSOUH & BELARBI) elle incarne un patrimoine à la fois **matériel** et It embodies both tangible and intangible heritage, whose richness and diversity reflect a centuries-old history marked by Berber, Andalusian, Arab, and Ottoman influences (Benkada, 2016).

The Notion of Cultural Heritage: Cultural heritage is defined as "the entire set of assets, tangible or intangible, with certain artistic and/or historical importance, belonging either to a private entity (person, company, association, etc.) or to a public entity (municipality, department, region, country, etc.); this set is generally preserved, restored, safeguarded" (*patrimoine*, 2005).

1.1. Tangible Cultural Heritage

Tangible Cultural Heritage is the physical legacy of the past, which can be touched, seen, and localized, and which bears witness to the evolution of human cultures."

The urban fabric evolved with the succession of different dynasties that governed the city (Idrissid, Almoravid, Almohad, Zianid, and Ottoman). (BESSOUH & BELARBI) Among the important sites and monuments, we can mention in terms of tangible heritage (62 classified sites as historical sites and monuments as protected cultural properties) (Arts, 2025), for example, we cite:

- *The Grand Mosque (1136)*: Alongside the Grand Mosque of Algiers and the Grand Mosque of Nedroma, it is the only monument of the Almoravid dynasty subsisting today (wikipedia, 2025).
- *The Minaret of the Agadir Mosque*: Founded in 790 H / 1387 AD by Idris I, only a few traces of walls remain. Quadrangular in shape, 26.60 m high (Lafer, 2025).
- *El Mansourah*: The historical site of Mansourah is a place to visit during passages in Tlemcen. Currently, only the north and west parts of the ramparts and the mosque remain. The walls, with a development of about four meters, delimited an area of 100 hectares. Made of pisé, 1.50 m thick and 12 m high, flanked by 80 towers, they have almost disappeared in the east and south (Tlemcen, 2025).
- *The El Mechouar Citadel*: Built in 1145 by Abd El Moumen Ben Ali of the Almohad dynasty. This place served as a military camp during the siege of Agadir, around the middle of the XIth century. The Mechouar, a very famous citadel, acquired glory and played a determining role in all fields: political, social, military, and others. Worthy of its etymology, "**the Place of Mouchawara**" or consultative councils, it was still the residence of the central government (tlemcen-dz, 2025).
- *The Sanctuary of Sidi Boumediene*: Built in 1339 in the El Eubbad district by the Merinid Sultan Abou Hassan Ali, known as "the Black Sultan". It is another pillar, mixing historical, architectural, and spiritual dimensions, and attracts a significant flow of pilgrims beyond simple cultural tourism.
- *Natural Sites*: Tlemcen can boast natural assets of great beauty and spectacular places, for example, we can cite:
 - *The Tlemcen National Park*: This park hosts more than 100 species of rare protected plants, including the fauna, notably the famous Barbary deer, a species unique in the world.
 - *The Beni Add Caves*: Located on the heights of the municipality of Ain Fezza, it is one of the most important natural museums in the world, spanning 700m with a depth reaching 57 meters; its volcanic walls conceal secrets with the limestone concretions that form stalactites and stalagmites in the most varied and beautiful forms (Tlemcen D., 2025).
 - *The El Ourit Waterfalls*: Still in the municipality of Ain Fezza, the visitor is captivated by the spectacle of the El Ourit waterfalls of rare beauty that cascade down the mountains.

Figure n01 Minaret de la mosquée ; the grandmosque, The mechouar citadel, el Mansourah



Source Internet compiled by the researcher

1.2. Intangible Cultural Heritage

Over time, the notion of heritage has been broadened; it no longer remains within its restricted definition which shows that heritage is only tangible, but it has developed even further; "the patrimonial content goes beyond the idea of cultural objects to that of cultural processes".

Intangible cultural heritage includes: "The practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, and know-how as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts, and cultural spaces associated therewith that communities, groups, and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage is transmitted from generation to generation" (convention, 2003) (BENCHACHOU & YEBDRI, 2018).

To sustain tourism stays, the Tlemcen destination cannot be limited to its vestiges alone. The integration of intangible and natural wealth is essential to offer a complete experience and contribute to inclusive local development.

The intangible heritage, for its part, is manifested through Andalusian music, Tlemcen embroidery (classified as intangible cultural heritage of humanity by UNESCO in 2012), local gastronomy, and artisanal know-how transmitted from generation to generation (unesco, 2025).

- *Musical Arts*: They are carried and conveyed by choirs such as *haoufi*, *haouzi*, *andalou*, and *Chaabi*. Ensembles like *Ryadh el Andalous*, *Gharnata*, *Kortobia*, and *Mouahidia* establish the reputation of both the region and the country, in addition to their real echo abroad.
- *Chdda*: Worn during family ceremonies, for its historical and anthropological value marked by ancestral know-how and intergenerational creativity, it is erected as a socio-cultural heritage, an identity symbol of an entire region of the country. Inscribed in 2012 by UNESCO on the representative list of the intangible heritage of humanity (unesco, 2025). Dating from before the fall of Andalusia in 1492, the "*Tlemcen Chedda*," a sign of authority and social nobility, was worn by princesses and dignitaries of Tlemcen during the reign of the Zianides. It was in the XVIIth century that the "*Chedda*" took its current form, made of several pieces of fabric with a homogeneous cut and colors; the nuptial costume is notably composed of a traditional velvet caftan embroidered with gold thread, adorned with cultured pearls, necklaces, and the "*meskia*". "*Khorsas*" (earrings that fall on the temples) and enormous earrings are suspended from a conical cap embroidered with gold thread and placed on the head (l'EXPRESSION, 2022).
- *The Masculine Costume*: It consists of the *djellaba* accompanied by a *chéchia* or red wool *tarbouche* as well as *babouches* or *blegha*, the *burnous*, the turban, and the wide *aaroubi* pants.

Figure n02 Intangible heritage of Tlemcen



Source Internet compiled by the researcher

- **Jewelry and Ornaments:**
 - *El assaba*: A head ornament worn on the forehead, set with worked and finely chiseled silver.
 - *El zerouf*: Precious stones and pearls worn by the bride on her wedding day.
 - *El aqrat*: The most prestigious is *elkhamsa* or *lounaisse el aqd*, made of either gold or precious stones.
 - *El cravache*: Called *cravache "boulahia"* because it has the shape of a beard. It is a very important part of the Chedda outfit, in addition to *elkhamsa* which goes with it.
 - *El mssayess*: Also called *esseb'a* due to the seven assortments that compose it, including rings and bracelets.
- **The Tlemcen Carpet**: It is distinguished by the shape of its designs inspired by the city's history. Among the most famous, we cite those of: Seb dou, Beni Snouss, El Bourabeh el hachaïchi, el hanbel, El Haik of different shapes and colors (DTA, 2025).
- **Leather Goods**: Including saddlery, which is the successful example of leatherwork. The most beautiful saddles and ornaments are reserved for the fantasia. They are made of real leather sewn with gold thread, with the cartridge belt.
- **Copperware**: Artisans and creators produce veritable masterpieces, including kitchen utensils and various decorative objects in Islamic sculpture.
- **Woodwork and Sculpture**: This is a traditional art that gives life to dead wood thanks to expert hands. It is responsible for richly decorated domestic utensils and furniture.
- **Tlemcen Cuisine**: The traditional cuisine of Tlemcen is the heir of the civilizations that have trodden its soil, but it is also a cuisine influenced by its geographical position as well as its orchards, which have conferred upon it a very flavorful cuisine, utilizing very rich local products. (Chehrazed, 2025). Although refined, Tlemcen cuisine is composed of a set of rustic dishes that are Berber legacies attributed to the inhabitants of the Tlemcen mountains. Several foods reflect Tlemcen's Andalusian identity; these are generally sweet and savory foods based on a reduced and syrupy sauce. Tlemcen is also the undisputed **city of spices**. Tlemcen cuisine requires no less than **30 spices**. Among the most used spices are cinnamon (*arfa*), cloves (*arounfél*), cumin (*kémoun*), turmeric (*korkem*), caraway (*karwiya*), ginger (*sékénjbir*), Arabic gum (*méska*), and fennel seeds (*zeri3at el besbess*). In addition to the typical Tlemcen soups, several dishes called *mar'a* are found among these typically Tlemcen dishes, the most famous being: *El Brania*, *El mkheter*, *El bebouch* (البوش), *Maar'a bel la3sel* (مرقة بالعسل), *El Bar'ouae*.

Figure n02 Traditional Tlemcenese Cuisine



Source Internet compiled by the researcher

1.3. The "Tlemcen 2011" Event

Tlemcen's heritage importance was recognized nationally and internationally, notably during the city's designation as "**Islamic Culture Capital 2011**" by the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO). This event led to the restoration of numerous monuments, the creation of museums, and the development of sites like Lalla Setti, transformed into a leading tourist and cultural space ((Ministère, 2012)). The event proved the logistical capacity of the *wilaya* and helped put the destination back on the map of international and Maghreb tourism.

However, cultural events, by their ephemeral nature, must be transformed into a long-term development dynamic. Research has shown that, despite massive investments, the event did not succeed in establishing sustainable cultural tourist itineraries or ensuring the necessary strategic coordination post-event (ADDOUN, 2024). The current challenge therefore lies in converting this occasional attractiveness into a constant tourist flow that benefits local development (Belguidoum & Bennadji, 2018).

II. Cultural tourism in Tlemcen: Situation, challenges, and limitations

Despite an exceptionally rich cultural heritage, the city of Tlemcen struggles to transform this potential into sustainable and structured cultural tourism. While the restoration of numerous sites and the implementation of heritage programs have marked important progress, the sustainability of the local tourism model remains limited by structural, institutional, and social weaknesses. In terms of figures, the *wilaya* of Tlemcen does not publish recent comparable data, which suggests a difficulty in transforming its heritage potential into measurable tourist flows.

1. Exceptional but under-Valorized Heritage Potential

Tlemcen brings together a unique set of cultural and natural resources: historical monuments, intangible heritage, and natural sites. However, this heritage remains fragmented and weakly valorized from a tourism perspective. According to (Kherbouche, A, 2019) and (Belguidoum, S; Bennadji, A, 2018), the city suffers from a lack of integration between sites, limited signage, and a narrowly diversified tourism offer, which prevents the creation of a truly structured "cultural destination". Most cultural circuits are spontaneous or informal, often dependent on isolated private or associative initiatives. The natural heritage, for its part, remains weakly exploited in a sustainable logic, without coordination between cultural tourism and ecotourism.

2. A Governance model that is still poorly coordinated and participatory

Heritage management in Tlemcen is marked by a multiplicity of stakeholders – public institutions, local authorities, associations, private operators – but without effective coordination. According to (Boukraa, 2020), this institutional fragmentation creates overlapping jurisdictions and delays in project implementation. Furthermore, the participation of residents and artisans remains marginal, even though they are essential actors in the preservation and transmission of heritage. The absence of participatory mechanisms limits the social sustainability of cultural tourism. As noted by (Richards, G, 2018), cultural tourism can only be sustainable if it is based on a co-creation of value between visitors and local communities. This weak integration of stakeholders is also reflected in training: guides, artisans, and young entrepreneurs often lack support in terms of responsible tourism and heritage interpretation (Ouali, 2020).

3. Challenges of Sustainability and Transition

The main challenge for Tlemcen lies in the transition from classic heritage tourism to a model of sustainable and inclusive tourism. Heritage can only fulfill its role as a lever for local development if it is managed as a living resource, according to a logic of economic, social, and environmental sustainability (Grefe, X, 2010); (OECD, 2022).

The main identified obstacles are:

- The absence of a clear local strategy linking heritage, tourism, and economic development.
- The weak connection between the urban offer (historical sites) and the peripheral one (natural sites).
- The lack of monitoring indicators (attendance, economic benefits, social impact).
- And insufficient cultural mediation, which limits visitors' understanding of the heritage.

These limitations underline the need for a global strategic reflection: rethinking cultural tourism not as a simple consumption of heritage, but as a sustainable process of shared valorization involving institutions, residents, and visitors.

III. Public strategies for sustainable heritage valorization in Tlemcen

The analysis of cultural tourism in Tlemcen highlights a profound gap between the city's considerable heritage potential and its weak translation into a sustainable tourism dynamic. This section therefore analyzes the main heritage valorization strategies undertaken by the State in favor of sustainable cultural tourism in Tlemcen.

The public strategies for heritage valorization in Tlemcen revolve around **three complementary axes**:

- *Preservation* of the built environment and traditions through a robust legal framework and national restoration programs;
- *Economic valorization* through the integration of heritage into the tourist and cultural offer;
- *International openness* via cooperation partnerships and multilateral financing mechanisms.

These efforts reflect a desire to make Tlemcen a model of sustainable cultural development, reconciling memory, identity, and tourist attractiveness. To this end, the State has implemented several structuring programs, both legislative, institutional, and operational, aimed at protecting and highlighting its rich tangible and intangible heritage.

1. Legislative and institutional framework

Heritage valorization is based on a solid legal foundation. Law n° 98-04 of June 15, 1998, relating to the protection of cultural heritage (Official Journal n°44, 1998), establishes the principles of classification, restoration, and valorization of tangible and intangible cultural properties. It entrusts this mission to the Ministry of Culture and Arts, in coordination with local authorities and heritage institutions. As part of cultural decentralization, Wilaya Cultural Directorates (DCW) have been created to monitor local management. The one in Tlemcen notably oversees the classification of monuments, the issuance of restoration authorizations, and the supervision of cultural projects.

According to the National Land Use Plan (PNAT, 2010), the *wilaya* of Tlemcen was classified among the "cultural balance poles" of Western Algeria, due to the density and diversity of its historical heritage.

2. Restoration and rehabilitation programs

The State has launched several large-scale restoration programs in Tlemcen, particularly as part of the event "Tlemcen, Islamic Culture Capital 2011," organized under the auspices of the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO). This program, led by the Ministry of Culture, mobilized an envelope of 1.3 billion dinars (Nawel.D, 2011) for the rehabilitation of 25 historical sites, including:

- The Mechouar Palace: Restored and transformed into a historical museum;
- The Grand Mosque of Tlemcen: Classified as national heritage in 1900, which benefited from a complete restoration of the stuccos and mosaics;
- The Mansoura ramparts and the vestiges of the Mansourah mosque: Protected by ministerial decree (Executive Decree n° 03-324 of October 5, 2003).

Other interventions concerned the Mausoleum of Sidi Boumediene, the El-Ourit waterfalls, as well as the medina of El-Eubbad, as part of the National Program for the Safeguarding of Historical Sites and Monuments (PNSM) (unesco, 2013). These operations aim not only at conservation but also at the economic and tourist valorization of the restored heritage, in accordance with the National Tourism Development Strategy (SNDT 2030), adopted in 2008.

3. Promotion of cultural tourism and sustainable development

The integration of heritage into the tourism dynamic is based on the National Strategy for Sustainable Tourism until 2030 (MTA, 2013). This strategy identifies Tlemcen as a "cultural tourism pole with a Maghreb vocation," due to the concentration of classified sites and its potential in terms of craftsmanship and charming accommodation. Several initiatives have been supported by the State:

- The creation of the "from the medina to natural sites" cultural circuit, linking the city center monuments to the Beni Add caves and the El-Ourit waterfalls.
- Support for cultural tourism entrepreneurs, notably patrimonial guesthouses approved in the old city (Tlemcen Tourism Directorate labeling program, 2019).
- The training of tourist guides specialized in local heritage, in partnership with the National School of Tourism (ENST, Algiers) and the *wilaya* directorates.

These actions reflect the State's desire to orient tourism towards a sustainable model, articulated around heritage protection and community participation.

4. Partnerships and international cooperation

The Algerian State also relies on multilateral cooperation to finance and frame the valorization of Tlemcen's heritage. The "Medinas 2030" project conducted with the World Bank and UNESCO aims at the sustainable revitalization of the historical centers of the Maghreb, including Tlemcen. European programs (EUROMED Heritage IV) have allowed the training of Algerian experts in

urban heritage restoration and management. Finally, the National Cultural Heritage Fund, created in 2011, supports local restoration initiatives, particularly in classified areas (Culture, 2015). These partnerships strengthen the participatory governance of heritage, while introducing international standards of sustainability and cultural interpretation.

However, despite this valorization, heritage management in Tlemcen remains confronted with several challenges:

- The lack of coordination between institutional actors,
- The weak involvement of residents in restoration projects,
- And a still sectoral approach to tourism development (Boukraa, 2020).
- An immense symbolic capital, but still partially exploited as a lever for sustainable local development (Grefe, 2010; Richards, 2018).

IV. Perspectives and challenges for sustainable heritage Valorization in Tlemcen

The valorization of Tlemcen's heritage therefore requires an integrated approach, combining preservation, tourist attractiveness, and community participation. Heritage must no longer be perceived as a simple memory of the past, but as a strategic asset capable of strengthening social cohesion, attracting investment, and supporting the creation of local jobs (OECD, 2022).

Three major axes emerge: the rehabilitation of sites and living museums, the involvement of residents and artisans, and the integration of heritage into the global tourism offer.

1. Rehabilitation of sites and creation of "Living Museums"

The rehabilitation of the built heritage constitutes the first step of a sustainable strategy. Tlemcen houses an exceptional set of historical monuments such as the Grand Mosque (XIth century), the Mechouar, the Mausoleum of Sidi Boumediene, or the ruins of Mansoura, which testify to the city's influence throughout the centuries. These sites, although listed on the national heritage list, require regular maintenance, restoration, and valorization programs. The experience carried out during "Tlemcen, Islamic Culture Capital 2011" showed the potential of such initiatives: several monuments were restored, and museums were modernized (notably the Tlemcen Museum of Art and History).

However, to ensure the sustainability of these efforts, it is necessary to go beyond simple architectural restoration:

- By transforming certain spaces into "*living museums*," where visitors can observe, experience, and participate (e.g., craft demonstrations, calligraphy or embroidery workshops).
- By integrating new technologies (interactive guided tours, multilingual audio guides, mobile applications).

These steps make the heritage more attractive, educational, and accessible, while raising visitors' awareness of its conservation.

2. Involvement of residents and artisans in valorization

The sustainability of cultural tourism strongly depends on the participation of local communities. In Tlemcen, residents, artisans, associations, and young entrepreneurs must be considered as direct actors in the heritage valorization process. Tlemcen artisans, heirs of ancestral know-how in embroidery (Chedda), copperware, ceramics, or leatherwork, play a key role in the transmission of intangible heritage. Their involvement in tourist circuits through workshops open to the public, demonstrations, or direct sales helps strengthen the authenticity of the tourist experience while supporting the local economy.

Moreover, cultural associations and women's cooperatives can be encouraged to participate in educational projects (school visits, craft activities, heritage festivals). This strengthens the sense of belonging, creates local jobs, and preserves living traditions. Such a participatory approach aligns with the principles of UNESCO (2003 Convention) on the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage, which insists on the role of communities in the conservation and valorization of their heritage.

3. Integration of Heritage into the Global Tourism Offer

For cultural heritage to become a true engine of sustainable development, it must be fully integrated into Tlemcen's tourism offer. This implies diversifying tourism products while maintaining a strong link with the local identity.

Several forms of integration are possible:

- *Patrimonial Guesthouses*: Certain old residences can be restored and transformed into tourist accommodation, while preserving their traditional architecture (patio, *zellige*, carved wood). These establishments promote direct contact between visitors and residents and participate in the preservation of the old built environment.
- *Local Gastronomy*: Tlemcen specialties (*m'hadjeb*, *rechta*, *chakhchoukha*, traditional cakes) constitute a strong element of the intangible heritage. Their valorization in restaurants, guesthouses, or culinary festivals strengthens the link between culture and culinary pleasure.
- *Artisanal Workshops and Thematic Circuits*: Routes integrating the visit of monuments, meeting with artisans, and discovering local products (olive oil, pottery, fabrics) make it possible to offer a complete and authentic tourist experience.

By combining accommodation, gastronomy, and craftsmanship, Tlemcen can develop an integrated cultural tourism model, respectful of its environment and identity.

Conclusion

The analysis of cultural tourism in Tlemcen reveals a deep ambivalence between remarkable heritage potential and still limited tourist exploitation. Despite significant restoration and valorization efforts led by the State (notably since Tlemcen, Islamic Culture Capital 2011) the city remains constrained by several factors: centralization of decisions, weak coordination between actors, lack of adapted infrastructure, and absence of a coherent territorial marketing strategy. These structural obstacles reflect a gap between heritage preservation and its economic and social valorization.

To remedy this, it is necessary to adopt an integrated and participatory approach:

- Associate residents, artisans, and local associations with cultural governance;
- Strengthen the training of guides and tourist operators;
- Develop cultural and ecotourism circuits linking the built heritage to natural sites;
- And promote the "Sustainable Tlemcen" brand through digital and collaborative tools.

Ultimately, Tlemcen can become a model of sustainable cultural tourism in Algeria if it manages to transform its cultural assets into genuine local development resources, by overcoming the current obstacles and focusing on a responsible and inclusive valorization of heritage.

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