

01 Ferry // Border control // First gas station // Trip to the south

Even though there are several possibilities, I choose the Italian ferry GNV Grandi Navi Veloge, because the journey is more pleasant and the arrival is on time. The different entry forms can be filled out and given to the officers by yourself. On the ship you can pay with EUR.

If one chooses the ferry from Tunisia, long waiting times have to be calculated in order to get all the entry formalities filled out and stamped on the ship. The border control is that way more simple. On Tunisian ferries you can pay with Dinars only.

After the usual and uncomplicated duty and entry formalities are done one gets a blue form with the car registration. The question if an „entry service“ is desired, is just a simple try of the officers to earn black cash, it should be ignored because it's unnecessary. There is nothing to pay to enter the country.

After two more officers collected all forms except the blue one for the car, the way to Tunis is free. We were happy that all formalities were done in just one hour. Two to three hours are usual and should be calculated.

Next to the freeway entrance in direction to Tunis is a gas station with an international bank teller (ATM). So you can fill the tank while getting Tunisian Dinars. *N36°44,293' - E10°13,063'*

Who plans to continue to the south, can use the freeway to Sfax. Attention to all who want to take the direct route through Kairouan! The local drivers are no safety gurus. Cars without light in the dawn, playing kids and bicycle drivers without light or reflectors need the highest concentration and readiness from all drivers.

Who wants to camp reaches the beach short after Hammamet, at Bou Ficha *N36°16.146' - E10°29.553'*. Short after this beach, in Port El Kantaoui is the hotel Marhaba Palace, a not exactly pretty but bombastic tourist castle with beautiful garden and beach. With a little negotiation talent you get a double bed with breakfast and dinner for two persons (kitchen closes at 10 p.m.) for 50 EUR.

02 Stopover in Djerba // Shopping // Beach camp

Who doesn't take the direct way to Libya, can upgrade the tour with a short side trip to Djerba. Along the direct way to the ferry is very little traffic. The ferries drive on a regular base and are very cheap. 0.8 TD (800 Dirham) per one way trip. This saves many kilometers!

After reaching the island you are in Houmt Souk within a half hour. There I suggest you to stay in the hotel Lotos, across the entrance of the Marina. It's an old building without luxury but very charming. The service is extraordinary good and friendly, the food is very good, and the beer and the fig liquor are well cooled. The vehicles can be parked inside the safe, lockable courtyard. Also here you get with negotiation talent a double bed room with breakfast for around 40 Dinar. The WLAN is free. *N33°53,055' - E10°51,388'*

Who looks for exclusivity and luxury can stay in the hotel restaurant Arischa. The courtyard with pool is surrounded by arcades. The food is very good. The prices are very high. The location in the middle of the market area (see photos) is ideal, but there is no lockable courtyard for the vehicles.

Walking the one kilometer towards the center, passing idyllic places with nice cafes and bars, you reach the market. The colorful life in this town is truly delightful and invites to stay. The enormous Sunday market with mainly locals and local youngsters fascinated us. We had luck. The dealers in the souks didn't try too hard to sell their goods. Maybe this was due to the fact that we travelled outside the high season. There were no other Europeans visiting the market. Along the beaches in the east are huge hotels made for the mass tourism during the high season. All of this would not suggest the charming experience we saw this time.

In a small alley is a store protected by an rod fencing - *N33°52,232' - E10°51,331'* - behind the big "Sahara Comfort" supermarket we "refuel" our wine sources and bought very good, delicious homemade red wine for 5,80 TD per bottle.

In the courtyard of our hotel we poured the bottles into our 24 liter canister. We used this location to load our wine supplies at least for safety precautions against the authorities.

After we found out that we don't need the ladder to get into the Autocamp AirTop on the roof, our hotel owner offered to store the ladder and the second set of summer sleeping bags in the hotel. Thanks! Now we had to fill the water tanks and we were ready to hit the road in order to meet the other Libya travelers.

The most practical meeting point is at the beach near Ben Guerdane. Additionally many goods for the desert trip may be bought here. At the traffic circle in the civic center, go left to Djerba and at the big left turn with intersection, go right towards the beach, after a few kilometers you'll reach the camp site where the palms and fisher boats are located. *N33°12,226' - E11°16,332'*

On the following day we drove along the beach and then through olive nurseries off-road to Jamila, after 32 more kilometers we reached the border in Rass Ajdir.

03 Crossing the border // First impressions of Libya

After about 40 minutes the Tunisian border control was done, in the border zone before the Libyan border we met the guide Ayssa and the police officer Maseoud (without uniform). For the period of our trip the two will join in as "guide and supervisor". This is law and a trip through Libya cannot be made without them. Besides all official duties, the two friendly companions will be our guides and translators, to find the best and safest way through the desert. They are also the protectors of the scenic places and the native Bedouins. Taking all this into account, the relatively high cost for the "guidance" of €450 per person or €3.600 total, is well invested money.

Ayssa and Maseoud cleared customs within 2 hours. I used this time to use the truck scale to weigh my overloaded Rubicon. Without passengers it weighed 2.750 kg instead of the allowed max. 2.501 kg. The Rubicon Express 4,5" Super Flex suspension with the rear springs for the Jeep Unlimited paid off. Crossing all the countless dips (silent policeman) the suspension performed perfect, without any unexpected movements, swings or oscillations. I wonder how the fully loaded suspension will perform on washboard roads with long pumps.

After we continued from the border we instantly realized that the colorful vibrant oriental life is missing, compared to Tunisia. Everything seems controlled, similar to the depressing feeling when traveled to the ex-east bloc states behind the metal curtains. But the locals are very nice and friendly. The truck- and other drivers wave and blink.

Ayssa tried to get in Ghadames a permit to drive through the Hamada area. Europeans would believe that this could easily be done by phone, but not in Libya. But even the personal contact didn't help. Due to the fact that there were teams searching for oil in this area, they didn't want to give spy's a change and closed the whole area. So we had to drive very far around this area, instead of going from Darj (100 km east of Ghadames) directly to Idri (130 km west of Brak). We had to drive many boring kilometers. But what can you do? Different countries have different habits. Because the diesel costs only 0,15 Libya Dinars (€0,10) we were comforted by the low cost for the bypass.

04 Libyan Sahara // Ultra-pure pleasure

N27°31,715' - E13°38,943' the point to turn left, to the Sahara dune area. The excitement was great, finally getting to the Sahara dune area. The Adventure could start. We lowered the tire pressure and there we drove to a protected dune valley, surrounded by countless palm trees. Even though the today's drive was short we stopped the day trip. The hikes on the dunes and taking pictures were fun for everybody. The sunset was pure romantic.

Even though I had experienced south Tunisia last February, the drive to the Mandara lakes was an enjoyable experience. The feeling arises to ski or snowboard in deep snow. Offroad driving cannot be more beautiful and provide more adventures. Our guide Ayssa has a tremendous feeling for the right way and found with his trained eyes the most exciting but safest dune crossings. We who just followed his tracks, were totally exhausted from the endless impressions, taking movies and photos, when we finally sat down to the camp fire. This is how we finished our second day in the desert.

05 The natural beauty of the Mandara lakes

One more day in the off-roader surfer's paradise. The impressive landscape overwhelms me again and again. An almost unbelievable strong pleasure for any "nature freak" Today we look forward to see the famous Mandara lakes. The Um el Hassan lake $N26^{\circ}54,985'$ - $E13^{\circ}28,873'$ fascinates with the beautiful colored water, the surrounding vegetation and invites to hike around the lake. It's hard to believe what a beauty the nature has created here. At the Um el Ma lake $N26^{\circ}42,69'$ - $E13^{\circ}20,28'$ we took a rest in the middle of a breathtaking landscape. Bernhard took a bath in the 30 degree Celsius warm water; the warm water is captured under a 30 cm thick cold water zone. Hundreds of micro crabs tickle the legs. Spalti made some photos; I made a few 3D panoramas. The oasis is great to hang out and relax.

06 Thrilling actions with the Defender

From the Um el Ma lake we continued east to the Tedemka lake $N26^{\circ}56,095'$ - $E13^{\circ}39,887'$ where we hiked intensively. In the afternoon, on the way to the Gabroon lakes we planned to make a half day stop, to let our mind thoroughly soak up all the past impressions.

But on the way there it happened:

a harmless seeming dune crossing with soft sand and side leaning approach area could hardly be crossed with lots of trouble by Ayssa. I stopped and took a different line to approach the dune. My action took me through very rough terrain, but I didn't have to go sideways sliding, almost tilting over like Ayssa. I warned Bernhard by CB radio, he followed my tracks; Gert who came next did maybe not hear my warning and took Alyssa's line. He was lucky to stop just the instant before he tilted over at an angle of 34 degree. The Landrover Defender with pop-up camper roof has a tilt angle limit of just 35 degree because of the high center of gravity. So this was very close. On the passenger side the car was so deeply sunken into the soft sand that the door couldn't be opened, even though the clearance is very high. I positioned my Rubicon, which is fitted with all necessary recover gear, dune uphill on the side of the Landy and secured him with a tow strap. Due to the fact that the Landy has nothing to hook onto, we had the strap running over the roof and back through the open windows. The Landy was secured but didn't start while angled, so we pulled with the winch until it started. Gert was recovered. The aluminum construction of the Landy didn't withstand the loads. The front of the roof was bending to the side by several degrees. This popped the window out of the rubber mount and broke one corner off. To bad!

We drove to a flat area to fix the roof and window. The broken window was quickly taken out and glued. With the winch we pulled the roof from the opposite side until the angles were right and symmetric. Just the front window rubber which was old and brittle gave us a hard time. It would have been good to have a 5mm thick smooth cable, which we didn't have. After all, with united power and significant effort we managed to mount the front window with a cord and lots of grease, to make the vehicle drivable.

After this we searched for a nearby plateau to stay overnight and to relax. After the today's action I used the break to check and tighten bolts on my Rubicon Express suspension, which I installed just before this trip was started. Finally this action day came to a happy end.

07 Across the dune crests to the Gabroon lakes

The way to the Gabroon lakes is long, it can be a lot shorter if the way across the dune crests is taken. On the way there we passed the dried out Scheleghmin lake $N26^{\circ}47,63'$ - $E13^{\circ}27,78'$. After that we had similar impressions as before at the Mandara lakes. The Mahfou lake $N26^{\circ}47,31'$ - $E13^{\circ}30,36'$ shows off very picturesque and invites to take a break. However one realizes, compared to the nature beauties of the last days, much more Sahara "mass tourism". Shortly after this we came to the village Gabroon, with the Gabroon lake $N26^{\circ}48,17'$ - $E13^{\circ}31,81'$. Ghaddafi's almost sick settlement policy is responsible for abandoned villages, a sad sight. Only very few people remaining directly by the lake, make a living from tourism. The lake view was anyways worth the trip.

There is also a local, listen and wonder, a local ski rental. Experienced desert travelers know of course, not for the snow skiing but for skiing in the sand. Spalti demonstrated his, acquired in the snow, perfect carving knowledge on the dunes.

08 Back to civilization // Further westward to Margredeth

We reached Ubari after we drove a half day on very busy sand tracks.

09 The Arkakus high-plateau with rock-paintings and relief-style rock-drawings

After we left behind the pathetic suburbs of the town we found the tracks to the Arkakus area $N25^{\circ}46,538'$ - $E10^{\circ}34.523'$. Several hours of relatively boring, dusty driving followed until we arrived at a place with bizarre, huge stone blocks.

10 Rock-paintings in the Wadi Mathendous // Northern Murzuq area

A half day through rocky area with enormous dust clouds.

11 Long distance trip to Wau an Namus (maybe it will be named the 8. World wonder)

The Rubicon had 240 liter diesel, including a safety reserve, on board. We hoped to endure the coming up 890 km route with it.

12 Wau an Namus // The most breathtaking hole in the Namus

Following the southern route through the Wadi al Farigh we reached the „prettiest crater” on earth.

13 To the black mountains // The bug-devil in the Jeep Cherokee

With high-speed, partly with 120 km/h we rushed along the tracks in direction to Wau el Kebir, to reach the black mountains before sunset.

14 Haruj // The crater landscape // The bug-devil in the Landcruiser // New Year

The trip to the Haruj area was very exhausting.

15 Trip to north // The ruins of Sabrata // Back to Tunisia

Nobody wants to be in place of Karl.

16 Resume of a long tour // Tour participants

Before the start of a trip with eight participants, the preferences of each of them should be declared and an according travel plan should be created.

Tour participants

<i>Gert Pader:</i>	57 years, experienced Sahara driver, planner, mountain- cave rescuer, canyon guide.
<i>Helga Pader:</i>	49 years, experienced Sahara co-driver, and „boss of Gert”.
<i>Karl Tazianov:</i>	64 years, experienced Sahara driver, mountain- cave rescuer, 2. canyon guide.
<i>Hannes Glawischnig:</i>	80 years, experienced Sahara co-driver, world traveller.
<i>Bernhard Schellander:</i>	35 years, enthusiastic Africa driver, practitioner.
<i>Hermine „Ina“:</i>	49 years, enthusiastic Africa co-driver, caterer.
<i>Erich „Mucki“ Thaler:</i>	53 years, enthusiastic off-road driver, photographer.
<i>Gerhard „Spalti“ Skant:</i>	49 years, enthusiastic off-road co-driver, photographer.
<i>Ayssa:</i>	35 years, experienced Sahara guide, camel breeder.
<i>Massoud:</i>	29 years, policeman, experienced Sahara co-driver.

17 Concept comparisons of the vehicles

Jeep Cherokee: 15 years old, was 9 times in north-, and west-Africa. ARB roof rack, winch, BFGoodrich MT's, VM diesel 2.5 liter, lift-kit consisting of springs, shocks and control arms. Bernhard and Ina used the interior for sleeping, therefore many heavy loads were stored on the roof. More power would be great. Best mileage. Does everything well.

Toyota Landcruiser KZJ 95: 8 years old, several trips to north-, and west-Africa. Reinforced shocks, air support springs. Karl und Hannes sometimes slept on a wooden plate mounted inside below the lower window edge, and partly outdoors. More power and bigger tires would be great. Second best mileage. Well on dirt-tracks.

Toyota Landcruiser Pickup 4500 EFI: 2 years old, reinforced springs to carry camels, a true workhorse. 95 plus 65 liter stock tanks plus a 250 liter barrel on the truck-bed. Ayssa and Massoud slept only on the ground next to the car. Extremely bad mileage. In the dunes not a winner, otherwise perfect.

Landrover Defender 110 TDI: 4 years old, reinforced springs and shocks, hydraulically opening pop-top und lightweight interior from Lyndi, chip-tuning with 160 HP, hook-up winch for front and rear, Gert and Helga are excited about the camper comfort. Second best mileage. In the dunes not a winner, otherwise perfect.

Jeep Wrangler Rubicon JK: 2 years old, AEV bumpers front and rear, AEV snorkel with cyclone filter, Pro Comp Series 1079 aluminum rims 17x9" with Cooper Discoverer STT 35X12.50R-17 and Staun Bead Locks, Rubicon Express - RE7143 - JK 4.5" Super-Flex suspension with Bilstein 5100 Series shocks, Rugged Ridge winch and much more. Autocamp AirTop pop-up tent. Bad mileage. A dream in the dunes, otherwise, besides the diesel consumption, everywhere perfect.

p.s.: all photos to chapters 1 – 17 you find here: www.actioncamper.com/events.php?kn=LY&lng=en