Zembra and Zembretta, Tunisia’s mystery islands

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Standing on the coast of the Gulf of Tunis, an onlooker can contemplate the magnificent scenery of two islands in the distance in the Mediterranean: Zembra and Zembretta. Majestically welcoming, the islands are a pleasant discovery for lovers of nature and birds.

Zembra and Zembretta, in the north-eastern Gulf of Tunis, make up a national park boasting ecological wealth of plants and birds as well as breathtaking landscapes open to visitors who want to enjoy hiking and camping.

Zembra, the largest island, expands 375 hectares and reaches 450 metres above sea level. Consisting of a rock formation, Zembra has stunning and captivating cliffs for visitors to enjoy. Zembretta, 8km east of Zembra, covers an area of 7 hectares.

Zembra and Zembretta are today a national park boasting ecological wealth.

The islands, famous for being one of the richest national parks in Tunisia, are well known as the Islands of the richest national parks in Tunisia. This makes the park as the biggest colony of the Bird’s Ceyx’s shearwater in the Mediterranean.

The Tunisian government banned fishing and hunting activities on the islands in 1973 to protect its unique ecosystem. The park was classified by UNESCO as a biosphere reserve in 1977.

"Zembra is a habitat for the nesting marine birds but it is also a stop on the migratory route of birds. They stop there before going to Italy or to nest in Europe on their return journey from Europe," said Hichem Anzafrat, president of the Association of Friends of Birds.

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"There is a wealth of vegetation and birds, they also bear the marks of history as ruins of Roman and Phoenician settlements were discovered on the islands. The park is open for visitors, providing designated areas for hiking and camping. It can be accessed by boat but only under the supervision of the Tunisian Coast Guard to assure the safety of the ecological system.

"It is a beauty to look at and the serene and unique landscape is to be experienced at least once in your life. In addition to all that, it is an exciting adventure to camp there," Yaccoubi said.

She added: "Campers who visited the islands for the first time were amazed by how captivating nature can be around here. The sea is of a unique blue and the beaches are clean. Some people said that they could not possibly swim elsewhere after discovering those virgin beaches. For many of them, it felt like a paradise out of this world!"