

THE LAST GUARDIAN OF STORIES: INSIDE ESPACE DIWAN

In the winding alleys of the Medina of Tunis, where time lingers in the scent of spices and the whisper of ancient stones, there is a doorway that leads not just to a bookshop but to a universe of forgotten tales. A small wooden sign sways gently above it: Librairie Espace Diwan. Step inside, and the world shifts—here, the past is not past. It is alive, waiting patiently on dust-kissed shelves.

At the heart of this haven stands Sofiene Chahed, a guardian of words, a collector of memories. He was not destined for this life, not in the traditional sense. His path could have led elsewhere, far from ink and parchment. Yet, some callings are stronger than reason. In 1994, he breathed life into this space, once an old pastry shop that had, for over a century, filled the air with the sweetness of honeyed treats. But the ovens went cold, and for decades, silence took its place—until Sofiene transformed it, as he says, “from food for the stomach to food for the mind.” With gentle hands, he built more than a bookstore; he built a refuge for those who still seek knowledge in a world that is forgetting how to pause and listen.



A LIBRARY WOVEN FROM THE THREADS OF TIME

Espace Diwan is no ordinary bookshop. It is a labyrinth of history, where each book is a door, each shelf a portal. Here, the history of Tunisia is not merely stored; it is preserved, protected, offered freely to those who seek it. Researchers find solace in its pages, artists draw inspiration from its hidden gems, and wanderers stumble upon treasures they never knew they were searching for.

From rare manuscripts to old postcards, from fragile black-and-white photographs to posters dating back to 1890, Sofiene has gathered a collection that even the National Library envies. “I have books that no one else has,” he says, not out of pride, but out of love—a love for a heritage slipping through time’s fingers.

A MEDINA THAT FORGETS, A BOOKSELLER WHO REMEMBERS

the Medina has changed. Its souks, once bursting with the colors and textures of Tunisian craftsmanship, now drown under an invasion of foreign products. The weekend silence weighs heavy on its cobblestones. The past is fading, and Sofiene sees it. “The Medina was Tunisia’s face, the meeting place of travelers, the heart of our culture. But now? It needs voices to awaken it again.”

And so, he refuses to let it sleep.

Through Espace Diwan, he weaves history back into the present. He hosts literary gatherings, storytelling nights, and discussions where great professors and passionate minds come together beneath the glow of lanterns. He takes books to places where books have become strangers, reviving the spirit of reading in forgotten corners of the country.

Art, too, finds a home within these walls. Painters, calligraphers, and poets gather here, leaving behind echoes of their creativity. Among them, names like David Boon have brought their art to Diwan, leaving behind pieces of their soul.

THE KEEPER OF RARE PAGES

It is not easy, this work. Books have grown expensive, harder to find, more difficult to bring home. Yet Sofiene persists. Through friendships and a carefully built network of collectors and historians, he searches, gathers, and offers. Ambassadors, diplomats, thinkers from all over the world pass through his doors, drawn to the rare and irreplaceable pages he guards.

And while others may seek profit, Sofiene offers knowledge freely, asking nothing in return but that history be remembered, that curiosity never die.

A DOORWAY BETWEEN GENERATIONS

In a world rushing forward, forgetting to look back, Espace Diwan stands as a quiet rebellion against time. It is more than a bookstore—it is a living archive, a gathering place where the past speaks to the present. Young students sit cross-legged on the floor, flipping through pages yellowed with age, while elders trace their fingers over words they once read in their youth. Each visitor carries a story, and in the presence of these books, they become part of something larger—a shared memory, a culture preserved, a promise that history will not vanish into silence.

A FINAL INVITATION

If you ever find yourself wandering the Medina, lost between its sunlit terraces and shadowed alleys, let your feet guide you to Espace Diwan. Step inside. Breathe in the scent of old books, let your fingers trace the edges of forgotten stories, and listen—listen to the whispers of a city that refuses to be forgotten.

For as long as Espace Diwan stands, the past will never truly be lost.

A SHARED DREAM: MDINTI

Diwan does not stand alone. It shares its vision with Mdinti, an initiative dedicated to breathing life back into the Medina. As one of its founding members, Sofiene extends his hand further, reaching more people, building stronger bridges. Mdinti and Diwan are two sides of the same dream—a dream of a Medina that lives, speaks, and remembers.



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