

48 HOURS MARRAKECH

Uncover the exotic charms of Morocco's most exciting city, writes Mary Novakovich

Morocco's most fascinating city is a dizzying mix of scents, sights, sounds and tastes.

At its heart is the Medina, a pink-walled warren of noisy souks and narrow alleyways topped with rooftop cafes from which holidaymakers can watch the constant carnival in relative peace. It's chaotic, yes, but utterly captivating.

For many visitors, the Medina is Marrakech – and the growing number of riads in the district can offer clients an authentic flavour of Morocco. But the city has other sides to explore: the

French colonial Ville Nouvelle is in the same dusty pink shade as the Medina, but with wide boulevards and a more European feel. About six miles north of the Medina is La Palmeraie, a lush green area of golf courses and luxury resort hotels.

Winter brings chilly evenings, but with daytime temperatures in the low 20s, Marrakech is a stylish option for a few days under the North African sun.

► DAY ONE

09.00: Start the morning with a spiced coffee and some

pastries on the rooftop terrace at La Terrasse des Épices in the northern Medina. Take in the views of the Atlas Mountains in this relaxing spot before heading to the shaded courtyard below to check out the boutiques in Souk Cherifia.

terrassedesepices.com

10.00: Take the plunge into the labyrinth of Souk Smarine and be prepared to get lost among the colourful stalls beneath the slatted bamboo that covers many of the city's souks. Everyone loses their way at some point –



it's a rite of passage. Along the way, visitors will be tempted by stalls selling bright leather babouche slippers, traditional shirts, pottery, jewellery, lamps and many other goodies. Deep in the souk are the workshops where wrought-iron, woollen and leather goods are made, and if shoppers are lucky enough to time it right, they might be able to watch these skilled craftsmen at work.

11.00: By mid-morning, a break from the souks is in order. With any luck, visitors will find



Everyone loses their way in Marrakech's souks at some point – it's almost a rite of passage

themselves in Rahba Lakdima, an open marketplace filled with spice sellers, fruit stalls, henna artists and makeshift

apothecaries selling powdered cosmetics. Look out for Café des Épices on the square and head up to the roof terrace for a refreshing pot of mint tea – always poured from a great height so that it bubbles. Each pot holds three cups, which is the customary amount for each person to drink.

cafedesepices.net

12.00: Take another nose around the souks – allowing time to get lost again – then try to end up back in Rahba Lakdima. In the south-western

corner of the square is Nomad, an attractive spot for lunch. Choose from several roof terraces, all with views of the surrounding rooftops, and enjoy this restaurant's modern take on classic Moroccan dishes.

nomadmarrakech.com

14.30: Marrakech's mosques are off limits to non-Muslims, but holidaymakers can visit the Ben Youssef Medersa, a religious school that originated in the 14th century, but was more or less completely rebuilt 200 years later. The courtyard



→ and prayer hall have beautifully preserved and elaborately carved stucco archways and cedar lintels that deserve a closer look. It's a wonderfully calm place, even during busy times. Next door is the Marrakech Museum, a 19th-century palace with an impressive interior housing collections of Moroccan art and sculpture.
medersa-ben-youssef.com

18.00: As dusk falls, it's time to wander through Marrakech's most compelling spot, Djemaa el Fna. During the day, this massive square is home to snake charmers, pet monkeys and even tooth-pullers. But at night, the square fills up with food stalls selling freshly grilled meat and fish, with long trestle tables set out for passing diners to stop and savour the atmosphere as much as the meal itself. As barbecue smoke fills the air, the square echoes to the sounds of West African gnaoua singers and storytellers keeping their audiences spellbound with ancient tales told in Arabic.



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20.00: If the food stalls in Djemaa el Fna don't appeal, then dine in style at Le Marrakchi, where visitors can still watch all the action on the square from the restaurant's large windows. For non-carnivores, Marrakech's first vegetarian and vegan restaurant, Earth Café, is just a few minutes' walk south of Djemaa el Fna and is set in a cosy former riad.
lemarrakchi.com
earthcafemarrakech.com

▶ DAY TWO

10.00: Drink in the tranquil atmosphere of Jardin Majorelle, a beautiful garden in the Ville Nouvelle. Created by French painter Jacques Majorelle in 1923, it was bought by Yves Saint Laurent and his partner Pierre Bergé in 1980. Amid the palm groves, gardens, ponds and deep-blue pergolas is a simple memorial to Saint Laurent, as well as a charming tree-shaded cafe.

13.00: After a leisurely morning, stay in Ville Nouvelle for a French-inspired lunch at Kechmara, where the roof terrace is popular with well-dressed locals. For a change from shopping in the souks, have a browse through the Western-style boutiques nearby.
kechmara.com

14.00: It's worth tracking down Maison de la Photographie, hidden in the Medina near the Ben Youssef Medersa. This former fondouk (a courtyard inn for travellers) is now a photographic gallery showcasing the history of Morocco →



DO

Accept a pick-up service from a riad, if it's available: many riads are notoriously difficult to find on your own

DON'T

Wear skimpy clothing: it's better to keep shoulders and knees covered to avoid attracting unwanted attention





SAVE

Riad el Mezouar

Tucked away in the eastern part of the Medina is Riad el Mezouar, a sympathetically restored riad in a 17th-century palace, featuring authentic and hand-crafted Moroccan decor. This peaceful spot has an inviting pool in the courtyard, while the rooftop terrace is perfect for sundowners.

Doubles start at €125, including breakfast.

mezouar.com

SPEND

El Fenn

Vanessa Branson (founder of the Marrakech Biennale and sister of Richard) has converted neighbouring riads to create El Fenn, in which she displays her personal art collection. Many of the colourful rooms have private terraces, and there are three pools – including one on the roof – to choose from. Doubles start at €200 on a room-only basis.

el-fenn.com

SPLURGE

La Mamounia

Set just outside the Medina in luxuriant royal gardens, five-star La Mamounia is Marrakech at its most opulent and glamorous.

With its four restaurants, four bars, pools and spa, you can see why Churchill was a frequent guest. All rooms have terraces, many with views of the Atlas Mountains. Doubles from £257, room only.

mamounia.com



14.00: Maison Tiskiwin



22.00: Kosybar

PICTURE: WILLEM DE ROOIJ

→ and its people. The roof terrace cafe is ideal for drinking in views of the Medina. Maison Tiskiwin is one of the city's most intriguing museums. Dutch anthropologist Bert Flint's collection of artefacts vividly recalls the days of the old caravan trading routes between Marrakech and the Sahara.

maisondelaphotographie.ma
tiskiwin.com

20.00: Pop back to your hotel or riad to freshen up, before heading to Café Arabe for a sophisticated supper. This chic restaurant near La Terrasse des Épices offers a top-class menu mixing Italian and Moroccan flavours, which can be enjoyed either in the exotic interior or on the rooftop terrace.

cafearabe.com

22.00: Round off the evening with cocktails at Kosybar at the southern end of the Medina, near the old Jewish quarter. There are two roof terraces to choose from, both of which give holidaymakers the chance to listen to live R&B and jazz until 1am while – if they have any room left – sampling a few of the Japanese-Moroccan dishes on offer.

TW



La Mamounia