



# Understand Morocco

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Greetings in six languages, commutes by donkey, and Facebook status updates: it's all in a day's work in Morocco.

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Street food worthy of a king and marathon breakfasts are just the beginning – leave room for a seven-course *diffa* (feast).

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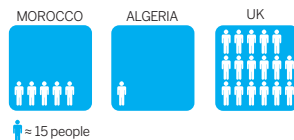
Bordered by the Atlantic, the Mediterranean and the Sahara, Morocco packs in half a dozen mountain ranges.

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## population per sq km



# Morocco Today

## Renovations in Progress

Wherever you go in Morocco, you'll see work in progress. New roads are reviving ancient caravan routes across desolate stretches of desert; signs announce new women's artisans' associations in mountain hamlets; a mosaic *maalem* (master artisan) hunkers in a niche in a palace wall with a tiny chisel, tapping out a zigzag shape to match a gap in the *zellij* (tilework) mosaic. Development schemes, self-help organisations and a savvy young king are helping to repair damages from a colonial past, cycles of poverty and official repression of expression – or as Driss ben Hamed Charhadi described it in his 1964 book of the same name, 'a life full of holes'.

Social rifts are not easy to fill. While economic growth remains around 3% to 4%, unemployment hovers around 44% for youth, and a 2011 cafe bombing in Marrakesh's cosmopolitan Djemaa el-Fna tragically underlined economic and cultural tensions. Though the outlook is brighter and the public mood lighter since Mohammed VI took the throne, two popular magazines were forced to cease publication in 2010: *Nichane* after a mildly irreverent article about Moroccan humour, and *Le Journal Hebdomadaire* after publishing a poll citing only a 91% approval rating for the king.

Yet as you can tell from centuries-old stone minarets and remarkably intact mudbrick castle towers dotting its rugged landscape, Morocco has already weathered adverse conditions over the past millennium without crumbling. With all available means – vibrant local organisations, plucky media, resilient senses of humour, a tiny chisel if necessary – Moroccans are fashioning a modern society on the foundations of an ancient one.

## Rise of the Tourism Economy

Your arrival is hotly anticipated in Morocco. The government's 'Vision 2010' of welcoming 10 million visitors by 2010 may have fallen shy of

» **Highest point**  
Jebel Toubkal  
(4167m)

» **Internet  
domain** .ma

» **Most popular  
Moroccan beverages:** Casa  
Flag Special  
beer (235  
million bottles  
consumed per  
year); Sidi Ali  
mineral water  
(200 million  
bottles)

## Top Books

» *The Sacred Night* Tahar Ben Jelloun's tale of a Marrakesh girl raised as a boy won France's Prix Goncourt.

» *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood* Fatima Mernissi's memoirs of 1940s Fez blend with other women's stories.

## Greeting People

» **Men** Handshake with right hand, then touch heart.

» **Women** Handshake plus one to four air kisses, depending on familiarity.

» **Men and women** Touch heart with right hand; optional handshake and air kisses.

## Fashion

» **Jellaba** Unisex ankle-length robe with a pointy hood and knotted silk buttons.

» **Tunic** Thigh-grazing, open-necked tops for men and women.