

# Welcome to Morocco

*Morocco is one of the most diverse countries in Africa, with high mountains, sweeping desert, rugged coastline, and the winding alleyways of ancient medina cities and souqs.*

## Mountains & Desert

From Saharan dunes to the peaks of the High Atlas, Morocco could have been tailor-made for travellers. Lyrical landscapes carpet this sublime slice of North Africa like the richly coloured and patterned rugs you'll lust after in local cooperatives. The mountains – the famous High Atlas but also the Rif and suntanned ranges leading to Saharan oases – offer simple, breathtaking pleasures: night skies glistening in the thin air, and views over a fluffy cloudbank from the Tizi n'Test pass. On lower ground, there are rugged coastlines, waterfalls, and caves in forested hills – and the mighty desert.

## Traditional Life

The varied terrain may inform your dreams, but it shapes the very lives of Morocco's Berbers, Arabs and Saharawis. Despite encroaching modernity, with motorways joining mosques and kasbahs as features of the landscape, Moroccan people remain closely connected to the environment. Nomadic southern 'Blue Men' brave the desert's burning expanses in robes and turbans, mobile phones in hand. Traditional life continues – with tweaks – in the techniques of Berber carpet makers, in date cooperatives, in medina spice trading, and in the lifestyles in mountain hamlets and ports like Essaouira.

## Moroccan Activities

Meeting the Moroccan people involves nothing more than sitting in a cafe and waiting for your mint tea to brew. The trick is to leave enough time to watch the world go by with the locals when there's so much else to fit in: hiking up North Africa's highest peak, learning to roll couscous, camel trekking, shopping in the souqs, getting lost in the medina, and sweating in the hammam. Between the activities, you can sleep in the famous riads, relax on panoramic terraces and grand squares, and mop up tajines flavoured with saffron and argan.

## Ancient Medinas

Often exotic, sometimes overwhelming and always unexpected, these ancient centres are bursting with Maghrebi mystique and madness: the perfect complement to the serene countryside. When you hit the town and join the crowds, you follow a fine tradition of nomads and traders stretching back centuries. Unesco has bestowed World Heritage status on the Fez medina, the world's largest living medieval Islamic city, and on the carnivalesque street theatre of the Djemaa el-Fna in Marrakesh.



## Why I Love Morocco

By Paul Clammer, Author

I first went to Morocco as a backpacking student in 1993. I didn't plan it – another trip had fallen through – but it was one of the happiest accidents of my life. I got wonderfully lost in the medina in Fez, got blisters climbing Jebel Toubkal and sunburn in the desert in Merzouga, and was hypnotised by the grand spectacle of Marrakesh's Djemaa el-Fna. Most importantly, I was inspired to come back, and over the past 20 years I've spent more time exploring this amazing land than any other country on the planet.

**For more about our authors, see p520**