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Morocco Today

Morocco is taking increasingly confident steps into the 21st century. Although global recession and regional politics resulted in a downturn in tourist numbers in recent years, the economy is slowly rebounding through its close ties to the EU and USA. While the perennially thorny issue of Western Sahara shows no sign of immediate resolution, some deft political manoeuvring by its savvy king helped the country avoid the regional turmoil of the Arab Spring.

Best on Film

Casanegra Nour-Eddine Lakhmari's film about growing up and confronting the darker side of Casablanca.

La Grande Villa Latif Lahlou's tale of a couple relocating from Paris to Casablanca.

A Thousand Months Faouzi Bensaidi's family epic. Winner of the 2003 Premier Regard at Cannes.

Marock Laila Marrakchi's film about a Muslim girl and a Jewish boy who fall in love. Winner of the Un Certain Regard at Cannes in 2005.

Best in Print

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.

The Polymath Bensalem Himmich's novel about 14th-century scholar and exile Ibn Khuldun.

Welcome to Paradise Mahi Binebine's novel exploring the promise and trauma of emigration.

Renovations in Progress

Wherever you go in Morocco, you'll see work in progress. Massive infrastructure projects are improving the transport network; signs announce new women's artisan associations in mountain hamlets; a mosaic *mâalem* (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). Development schemes, self-help organisations and economic liberalisation are attempting to move the country on from cycles of poverty and official censorship 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 sits around 3% to 4%, unemployment hovers around 45% for youth, and a 2011 cafe bombing in Marrakesh's cosmopolitan Djemaa el-Fna tragically underlined economic and cultural tensions. 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 the centuries-old stone minarets and remarkably intact mudbrick castle towers that dot 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 achieving its goal, due to recession in Europe, but tourism has more than doubled