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Morocco Today

Morocco in the early 21st century is a confident country, increasingly sure of its role as a stable link between Europe, Africa and the Arab world, and a place that welcomes tourists and investors alike. It sailed through the Arab Spring unscathed, and while the perennial question of Western Sahara shows no sign of resolution, the nation is taking big steps to cement its role as a regional player, and a leader in renewable energy and responses to climate change.

Best on Film

Casanegra (Nour-Eddine Lakhmari; 2008) A film about two friends growing up as hustlers on the gritty side of Casablanca.

La Grande Villa (Latif Lahlou; 2009) Tale of a Franco-Moroccan couple moving from Paris to Casablanca.

A Thousand Months (Faouzi Bensaidi; 2003) A family epic and winner of the 2003 Premier Regard at Cannes.

Marock (Laila Marrakchi; 2005) A Muslim girl and a Jewish boy are star-crossed lovers in Casablanca.

Behind Closed Doors (Mohammed Ahed Bensouda; 2013) Call to arms against sexual harassment of women.

Best in Print

The Sacred Night (Tahar ben Jelloun; 1987) This tale of a Marrakesh girl raised as a boy won France's prestigious Prix Goncourt.

Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harlem Girlhood (Fatima Mernissi; 1994) The author's memoirs of 1940s Fez blend with other women's stories.

The Polymath (Bensalem Himmich; 2004) A fictionalised retelling of the life of 14th-century scholar Ibn Khuldun.

For Bread Alone (Mohamed Choukri; 1973) A gritty autobiographical novel of growing up in extreme poverty, translated by Paul Bowles.

The Tourist Dirham

Tourism remains a key plank of Morocco's vision of the future. Tourism – through both direct and indirect jobs – is responsible for almost 18% of GDP and 16% of the nation's jobs. Around eight million tourists visit Morocco every year, a number that's doubled in the last decade, and would undoubtedly be higher were it not for the global economic downturn.

Newly refurbished airports continue to attract low-cost European and Gulf airlines, while the 'Plan Azur' has seen the number of coastal resorts, aimed at servicing the increasing popularity of Morocco as a destination for Arab as well as European travellers, greatly increase – a sign of traditional Moroccan flexibility in adapting to changing global travel patterns.

Regional Ambitions

On the geopolitical front, the unresolved conflict in Western Sahara has continued to make headlines. Morocco briefly threatened to expel the UN peacekeeping mission there after the UN secretary general used the word 'occupation' in relation to Morocco's presence in the disputed territory. Tensions flared further in 2016 when Morocco deployed new troops to the border with Mauritania, ostensibly to crack down on smuggling but raising protests from Saharawis.

Despite this, Western Sahara may no longer be the stumbling block to Morocco's regional ambitions that it once was. In July 2016 Morocco asked to rejoin the African Union, the regional body it had left in protest in 1984 when the Western Saharan government-in-exile was admitted. This move reflected Morocco's desire to flex its economic muscles in the region, and build on its growing economic influence in West Africa.

Part of Morocco's economic plan is to become Africa's flagship for green energy. The government has invested