

Destination Morocco

Morocco continues to tread a cautious path into the 21st century, facing up to the challenges imposed both by its official willingness to embrace globalisation and its deep traditional roots.

For most visitors, Morocco is primarily a tourist destination, and visitors are beginning to reap the rewards of the huge infrastructural projects driven by the government to meet King Mohammed VI's plan to attract 10 million tourists by the year 2010. Although rumours suggest that the date might be pushed back by a couple of years, recent years have seen an almost exponential rise in visitor numbers. A building boom has seen the great empty spaces that sat between Marrakesh and its airport now thickly planted with water-thirsty tourist hotels and apartments, with ground being broken on similar developments on the outskirts of Fez. The Mediterranean coast has seen even more startling changes, with expanding resorts following a new motorway improving access to this often-forgotten corner of the country. With the announcement of a high-speed rail link between Casablanca and Tangier, and the latter's huge new Renault-Nissan car plant, the signs all firmly declare that Morocco is open for business.

But despite this showy embrace of modernity, the fault lines of Moroccan society are still there to be read by anyone looking beyond the style magazine-friendly riads of the Marrakesh medina, in the often conflicting outlooks of conservative and liberal society, secular and Islamic, urban and rural, Arab and Berber.

Development and investment in schools, roads and health care have been a boon to most Moroccans, and economic liberalisation has helped fuel a growing middle class. But not everyone has been carried along. A young population (nearly 30% under 15 years) and high unemployment remain currently intractable problems. The situation of the rural poor has yet to improve significantly in many areas, while urban drift has led to the growth of slum areas around cities such as Casablanca.

These shanties provided the recruiting ground for the Salafia Jihadia terrorists, who carried out the Casablanca bombings in 2003 and a suicide bombing in 2007. The king's policy on dealing with this threat has been two fold – a crackdown on militants, and the encouragement of moderate Islamist parties to join the political consensus. Both have met with reasonable success, although the feeling of disillusionment with politics in general was seen in the general elections of September 2007, where little more than one in three people bothered to cast a vote. In the ballot, moderate Islamists didn't do as well as expected, with Royalist candidates coming out on top. Despite having a democratic process in place, power still flows from the throne, with the 'executive monarch' appointing all ministers (including the prime minister) directly.

Morocco sees its relations with Europe as vital, with both sides considering the country a key player in regional challenges such as illegal immigration, smuggling and terrorism. At the same time, the continued stalemate over the status of the Western Sahara prevents the normalisation of relations with its neighbours: the border with Algeria has been closed for years as a result, to the economic detriment of both countries.

As a bridge between the Western and the Islamic worlds, Morocco plays an important and often-undervalued role. Careful negotiation between these poles, and the contradictions of its own society will be key challenges in the future.

FAST FACTS

Population: 34.33 million

GDP per head: US\$4555

External debt: US\$19.9 billion

Life expectancy: 70.4 years

Adult literacy rate: 52.3%

Ranking on UN Human Development Index: 126 (of 177)

Population without access to an improved water source: 19%

Share of total world CO₂ emissions: 0.1%

Getting Started

Every trip bears some preparation time before you travel – not just to get a handle on the country you're visiting, but to give you time to enjoy the daydreams of what you'll do when you get there. This holds true especially for Morocco. The advent of the budget airlines has put it, for many, in the same bracket as just another short-haul destination, only a few hours from the major European capitals. But Morocco is far more than this: it's Africa and the Middle East rolled into one with all the rewards and challenges of the great continent and the culture of Islam. It is both a short ferry hop and a world away from Europe. Whether you're heading to the desert, the mountains or for a chic city break in a riad, forward planning with this guidebook in hand will help you get the most out of one of the most exciting travel destinations there is.

See Climate Charts on p458 for more information.

WHEN TO GO

Morocco is at its best in spring (mid-March to May), when the country is lush and green, followed by autumn (September to November) when the heat of summer has eased.

A popular saying has it that Morocco is a cold country with a hot sun, and you shouldn't underestimate the extremes of summer heat and winter, particularly in the High Atlas, where snowcapped peaks persist from November to July. If you are travelling in winter, head for the south, although be prepared for bitterly cold nights. Morocco's Mediterranean coast and Rif Mountains are frequently wet and cloudy in winter and early spring, and even Fez can be surprisingly cold.

Apart from the weather, it's the timing of Ramadan, the Muslim month of fasting and purification, which is another important consideration. During Ramadan some restaurants and cafés are closed during the day and general business hours are reduced – during the lifetime of this

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

- your ID card or passport and visa if required (p474)
- valid travel insurance (p467)
- driving licence, car documents and appropriate car insurance (p494) if driving
- loose-fitting cotton shirts and long skirts or trousers for women and men
- a universal washbasin plug or a tennis ball cut in half
- a few basic words of Arabic
- a good tent, warm sleeping bag and sturdy walking boots if you plan on trekking (p419)
- some wet-weather gear, preferably Gore-Tex
- a torch
- earplugs for successful sleeping in the noisier cheap hotels
- a water bottle, purification tablets and a medical kit (p499) for longer stays
- an emergency supply of toilet paper
- a sense of perspective – persistent shopkeepers are just trying to make a living and can actually be nice people
- patience – most things do run on time, but the timetable may be elusive to the uninitiated.

guidebook, Ramadan will fall during the hot summer months (for more details see p466).

COSTS & MONEY

Morocco isn't quite as cheap as you might think it is. Taking into account a few small tips, taxi fares, entry charges to museums, and with a willingness to stay in cheap hotels without respite, those carefully counting their dirhams could get by on Dh350 (US\$40) per day. At the other end of the scale, if you intend to travel in style in cities like Marrakesh, expect your daily budget to increase dramatically – quality accommodation starts at Dh600, hovers around Dh1100 and then keeps going skyward. Staying in an average-priced riad and enjoying quality restaurants will require a budget of at least Dh1000 a day per person. Outside the major cities most of the better accommodation tends to hover around Dh600.

A meal in a cheap restaurant costs as little as Dh30. In a midrange restaurant you'd pay up to Dh200 and in a more upmarket place it will cost around Dh300, including wine; in Marrakesh topping Dh500 to Dh700 wouldn't be uncommon.

If you want to explore the country in your own car, average hire charges for a small car (Renault Clio) are Dh500 per day. Petrol costs about Dh11 per litre, while diesel is cheaper at around Dh8 per litre. For a 4WD you are looking at about Dh1500 per day, with driver. Car hire is significantly cheaper if booked in advance rather than on the spot.

There's not much difference in price between trains and buses – a bus ticket between Casablanca and Marrakesh costs around Dh80, compared to Dh84 for a 2nd-class train ticket. As a general rule, a 100km bus or train journey costs about Dh28.

LANGUAGE

The official languages of Morocco are Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and French. Road signs are bilingual, although in the countryside and mountains French speakers aren't quite so common – Moroccan Berbers have their own languages (notably Tashelhit, Tarafit and Tamazight), and tend to speak MSA as their second language. English speakers tends to be commonplace only where you find tourists.

It repays the little effort needed to learn a few words or phrases in MSA. Other than Olympic tea-pouring skills, there's no better way to make friends and impress people in Morocco than to venture a few words in MSA or the local Berber language. Some Moroccans resent the fact that half a century on from independence, French is still the main language of trade. Even seen-it-all shopkeepers will be charmed by travellers attempting to use those few phrases of Tashelhit, Tarafit or Tamazight – quite a diplomatic coup, not to mention a real advantage when it comes to bargaining.

TRAVELLING RESPONSIBLY

Since our inception in 1973, Lonely Planet has encouraged readers to tread lightly, travel responsibly and enjoy the magic independent travel affords. International travel is growing at a jaw-dropping rate, and we still firmly believe in the benefits it can bring – but, as always, we encourage you to consider the impact your visit will have on both the global environment and the local economies, cultures and ecosystems.

The recent boom in Morocco has brought in huge numbers of tourists, many of whom are unaware of the different attitudes to life, dress and

HOW MUCH?

Pot of mint tea Dh8

Hammam Dh8-12

Petit-taxi ride Dh5-10

City bus ride Dh2-3

Local sim card Dh30

See the language chapter (p504) to get going with Darija and Berber.

behaviour in a Muslim country. To give yourself a head start on how your clothes can make the right or wrong impression, and to pick up a quick bit of local etiquette see boxed texts, p49 and p51.

Part of Morocco's tourist growth has been fuelled by the development of large hotel complexes and golf courses, both with an insatiable thirst for water in this dry country. Plunge pools of the sort found in riads tend to be better than Olympic-sized ones, with the added bonus that traditional architecture is designed to work with the environment rather than against it – thick mudbrick walls provide excellent insulation, and cut the need for energy-gobbling air-conditioning. There are more ideas on creative conservation of resources during your trip on p52.

For specific listings of more sustainable places to stay and activities, see the Greendex at the back of the book.

TRAVEL LITERATURE

The Caliph's House by Tahir Shah is a brilliant account of how a writer and filmmaker left behind London life to renovate the djinn-haunted former home of the caliph of Casablanca – overflowing with insight and Moroccan characters writ large. Check out his more recent *In Arabian Nights* for his delving into Morocco's rich storytelling tradition.

A young hippie takes her children to 1960s Marrakesh to find herself and an alternative life in Esther Freud's delightful and autobiographical *Hideous Kinky*. Famously made into a film starring Kate Winslet, the author's witty lightness-of-touch is even more engaging.

Morocco: In the Labyrinth of Dreams and Bazaars by Walter M Weiss is an ambitious journey through the contradictions of modern Morocco from its polyglot past to its modern liberal-conservative fault lines.

In *The Spider's House*, Paul Bowles presents Fez in the twilight of the French occupation as the arena for this political *tour de force* considered by many to be Bowles' finest. Daily Fez life, with its weblike complexities, provides a fascinating backdrop.

If you fancy living the riad dream, first check out *A House in Fez* by Suzanna Clarke, an excellent recounting of her purchase and restoration of a townhouse in the heart of the Fez medina, and the many challenges therein.

Tangier: City of the Dream by Iain Finlayson is a great book to pack if you're entering Morocco through this 'seedy, salacious, decadent, degenerate' city. There are plenty of insights into the Beat Generation of writers including Paul Bowles, William S Burroughs and Jack Kerouac.

Valley of the Casbahs: A Journey Across the Moroccan Sahara is an account of Jeffrey Taylers' epic modern-day camel journey from the Drâa Valley to the Atlantic, leaving behind tourist Morocco, with Berbers and a harsh desert terrain for company.

If you think your feet felt sore after a short hike in the mountains, you'll appreciate Hamish Brown's *The Mountains Look on Marrakech*, an expert walker's elegant account of his 900-mile 96-day trek from one end of the Atlas to the other.

Gavin Maxwell's *Lords of the Atlas* is a gripping story of intrigue and power amid the rise of the Glaoui family in southern Morocco. 'To call it a travel book is as inadequate as calling a camel a quadruped' wrote one reviewer, and we'd have to agree.

As guidebook writers we always appreciate the best in travel writing, and *Marrakech through Writers' Eyes* edited by Barnaby Rogerson and Rose Baring is like one of those feasts of endless Moroccan dishes that you can dip into again and again.

'There are plenty of insights into the Beat Generation of writers including Paul Bowles, William S Burroughs and Jack Kerouac'.

TOP 10

Madeira Is
(Portugal)

Canary Is

MOROCCO

Algeria

ESSENTIAL MOROCCAN EXPERIENCES

- 1 Enjoying a huge serving of couscous washed down with mint tea (p84)
- 2 Getting lost in any medina
- 3 Riding a camel into the sunset in the Sahara (p351)
- 4 Being hypnotised by the spectacle and colour of the Djemma el-Fna in Marrakesh (p298)
- 5 Pulling into Tangier (p169) by ferry across the Strait of Gibraltar
- 6 Hagglng for carpets (pp67-8)
- 7 Being entranced while watching Gnawa musicians (p63)
- 8 Sweating the stress away in a hammam (pp453-4)
- 9 Watching the sun rise along one of the spectacular treks in the High Atlas Mountains (p423)
- 10 Lounging in an elegantly trendy riad (p452)

MUST-SEE MOROCCAN MOVIES

Cinematic Morocco comes in many guises from hard-hitting social commentaries, usually the work of contemporary Moroccan filmmakers, to Hollywood fantasy with its illusory idea of exotic North Africa.

- 1 *Morocco* (1930) Director: Josef von Sternberg
- 2 *Casablanca* (1942) Director: Michael Curtiz
- 3 *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1956) Director: Alfred Hitchcock
- 4 *A Thousand and One Hands* (1972) Director: Souheil Ben Barka
- 5 *El Chergui* (1974) Director: Moumem Smihi
- 6 *Alyam Alyam* (1978) Director: Ahmed el Maanouni
- 7 *Le Coiffeur du Quartier des Pauvres* (1982) Director: Mohamed Reggab
- 8 *Hideous Kinky* (1998) Director: Gilles MacKinnon
- 9 *Ali Zaoua: Prince of the Streets* (2000) Director: Nabil Ayouch
- 10 *The Wind Horse* (2001) Director: Daoud Aoulad-Syad

FAVOURITE FESTIVALS

Moussems (festivals) honouring local saints are held across Morocco throughout the year, often drawing huge crowds. There is also a host of excellent international cultural events.

- 1 Almond Blossom Festival (Tafraoute and around; p463) February/March
- 2 Festival du Desert (Er-Rachidia, Merzouga and Rissani; p464) May
- 3 Moussem of Ben Aïssa (Meknès; p464) May/June
- 4 Gnaoua and World Music Festival (Essaouira; p464) June
- 5 Festival of World Sacred Music (Fez; p464) June/July
- 6 Festival International de Rabat (Rabat; p464) June/July
- 7 Marrakesh Popular Arts Festival (Marrakesh; p464) July
- 8 Timitar World Music Festival (Agadir; p464) July
- 9 International Cultural Festival (Assilah; p464) July/August
- 10 Marriage Festival (Imilchil; p464) September

IMPORTANT UPDATE TO TELEPHONE NUMBERS IN MOROCCO

Not long after research was completed, the telephone number system in Morocco changed. For fixed-line numbers in this book, please add a 5 after the initial zero (ie 035 00 00 00 becomes 0535 00 00 00). For mobile-phone numbers, please add a 6 after the initial zero (ie 072 00 00 00 becomes 0672 00 00 00).

INTERNET RESOURCES

The Lonely Planet website features the **Thorn Tree** (www.lonelyplanet.com/thorntree) bulletin board, where you can post questions and get the latest tips on Morocco.

Al-Bab (www.al-bab.com/maroc) Also called The Moroccan Gateway, Al-Bab has excellent links, especially for current affairs, news and good books about Morocco.

Maghreb Arts (www.maghrebarts.ma, in French) Up-to-the-minute coverage of theatre, film, music, festivals and media events in Morocco.

Maroc Blogs (<http://maroc-blogs.com>) Useful blog aggregator pulling in feeds from the entire Moroccan 'blogma' – blogging community.

Office National des Chemins de Fer (www.oncf.ma, in French) Official website of the Moroccan rail services with information on timetables and prices.

The View From Fez (<http://riadzany.blogspot.com>) News and views from Fez, but pulling in countryside stories of interest to travellers.

Tourism in Morocco (www.tourism-in-morocco.com/index_en.php) Morocco's official tourist information site; user-friendly, with guided tours, links and news.

Itineraries

CLASSIC ROUTES

Covering around 500km, this route dives into the heart of Moroccan history and culture. The trip starts in the grand medieval cities of the north and sweeps through modern seats of power on the coast, before finishing in Marrakesh, the heart of Moroccan tourism.

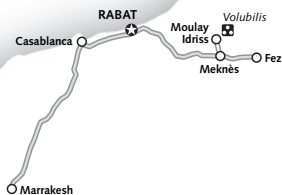
IMPERIAL CITIES

Immerse yourself in cities once ruled by enlightened dynasties, who crossed the Strait of Gibraltar and pulled Europe out of its Dark Ages. Begin in **Fez** (p228), venerable heart of Morocco's religious and cultural life, and see modern Morocco and its rich antecedent crowd for space in the extraordinary medina. **Meknès** (p254) is embodied in the lavish palace built by Sultan Moulay Ismail. **Volubilis** (p266), easily Morocco's best-preserved ancient city, stands testament to the astonishing breadth of the Roman Empire. Nearby **Moulay Idriss** (p268), home to the shrine of the founder of Morocco's first imperial dynasty, is a wonderful antidote to the clamour of the cities.

Two Weeks / Fez to Marrakesh

Rabat (p117) is enjoying its third period as Morocco's capital. A modern city of elegant French streets, its quiet, 12th-century medina hints at former imperial grandeur. Street-savvy **Casablanca** (p100), Morocco's principal port and most prosperous city, has an energy and anarchy rivalled only by **Marrakesh** (p293), icon of today's Morocco, where centuries of souqs, street performers and imperial architecture form an intoxicating mix.

ATLANTIC
OCEAN



MOROCCAN ODYSSEY

One Month / Imperial Cities & the South

With a month at your disposal and taking little time to rest, you can get a taste of the best Morocco has to offer, by journeying from the sea to the Sahara and back again. Fly in to **Casablanca** (p100) before heading to **Meknès** (p254) and **Fez** (p228).

From Fez, leave behind the noise and hassles of the city and head directly south to the relatively under-visited Middle Atlas around **Azrou** (p272) where the Barbary apes are one of Moroccan wildlife's most mischievous sights. Pretty **Ifrane** (p270) also stands at the heart of some stunning mountain scenery and offers enticing possibilities for hiking in the lush countryside, although continuing south through **Midelt** (p275) is arguably even more scenic. The journey through the delightful palm-and-*ksar* (fortified stronghold) terrain of the **Ziz Valley** (p363) is one of Morocco's most picturesque roads and carries you down towards **Merzouga** (p370), southwestern Morocco's gateway to the Sahara. Lorded over by towering dunes, it's an ideal spot in which to saddle up your camel and sleep under the stars amid Morocco's largest sand sea, the perfectly sculpted **Erg Chebbi** (p370).

Shadowing the High Atlas as you head southwest brings you to the sharp cleft of the **Todra Gorge** (p360). From here, you can travel through dramatic boulder-strewn valleys, full of nomad camps in springtime, into the **Dadès Gorge** (p357). If time allows, strike out from Boumalne du Dadès for some spectacular trekking around the **M'Goun Massif** (p437) before making for **Aït Benhaddou** (p339) which seems like an evocation of a fairytale.

En route to the coast, check into a luxurious riad in **Marrakesh** (p293), stay as long as you can, and then don't stop until you reach artsy **Essaouira** (p153).

You could get from Casablanca to Essaouira in a few hours. But it's far more fun to take in a thorough picture of Morocco en route. A month-long diversion takes in the best of the imperial cities, the Atlas mountains and the Saharan sand dunes.



CIRCLING THE SOUTH

Three Weeks / Agadir & the Sous

Morocco is far more than trendy riads (town houses) and tourist hordes shuttling between hotel, souq and sun lounger. This itinerary will take you deep into the south for wild mountain and desert landscapes, far from the maddening crowds and with plenty of activities to keep mind and body exercised.

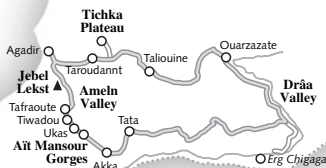
Agadir is a handy entry point to Morocco, but adventurers will want to leave quickly. Head first to tiny **Tafraoute** (p402) encircled by the beautiful **Ameln Valley** (p406) with its lush, green *palmeraies* (palm groves) and pink-hued houses. Hire a bike and camp by the painted rocks, spend three days climbing **Jebel Lekst** (p406), or trek through the **Aït Mansour Gorges** (p405) where the beautiful scenery contrasts poignantly with the ancient slave routes that once passed this way. Stay in **Tiwadou** (p405) then journey overland to see the rock engravings at **Ukas** (p406) before returning to Tafraoute.

By now you've a taste for the Moroccan wilderness so head east to the magnificent rock engravings around **Akka** (p407) and **Tata** (p407), then down to **Erg Chigaga** (p351), dunes that see few tourists. Leave your vehicle in M'Hamid and find yourself a camel to lead you north into the kasbah-littered **Drâa Valley** (p345).

At **Ouarzazate** (p340), go quad biking in the stony desert landscape famous for its film studios, then loop back through the saffron capital of **Taliouine** (p391) with a detour for a trekking reprise on the **Tichka Plateau** (p435). Forge on to **Taroudannt** (p387) with its red walls, backdrop of snow-capped peaks and hassle-free echoes of Marrakesh, before heading back to **Agadir** (p379) for the much-needed robust pampering of a hammam.

This 1000km journey will sweep you through the cream of Morocco's landscapes: the peaks of the Atlas mountains, the sandscapes of the desert and the kasbah-studded valleys of the south. Parts of the trip can be hard to access, so having your own wheels, and three weeks on the calendar will help you get the most out of this itinerary.

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THE MED & THE MOUNTAINS Three Weeks / Mediterranean Coast / Rif Mountains & Imperial Cities

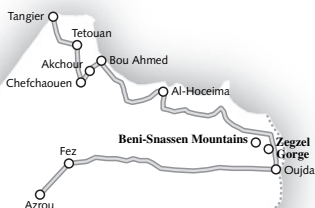
While the previous itinerary suggested heading south to escape the crowds, an equally good alternative is to look at Morocco's Mediterranean littoral and Rif Mountains. The region has seen huge investment from the government in recent years and there are big plans to push tourism in the area – but if you get in now you'll be ahead of the curve.

Start out in **Tangier** (p169), ideally arriving by ferry across the Strait of Gibraltar at this legendary port city. After a few days taking in the history, nightlife and restaurants, skip inland to **Tetouan** (p194), the old capital of Spanish Morocco, with its charming blend of Arab medina and Andalusian architecture. The Spanish left a lighter imprint on nearby **Chefchaouen** (p201), nestled in the Rif Mountains with its gorgeous blue-painted medina. It's a good trekking spot too, and you can head deep into the mountains on a five-day trek via **Akchour** (p443) to the tiny fishing village of Bou Ahmed. Continue east along the coast to **Al-Hoceima** (p211), gateway to the **National Park of Al-Hoceima** (p214) where you can also hike and enjoy homestays with local Berber families. There's more fine scenery to be enjoyed further inland at the **Beni-Snassen Mountains** (p225) and the achingly beautiful and flower-filled **Zegzel Gorge** (p226).

From here, head to **Oujda** (p283) to refresh yourself with some city comforts, before taking the train to that grandest of imperial cities, **Fez** (p228). Dive into the medina and relax in a riad, but if you find yourself missing the countryside, you can still make an easy day (or several-day) trip into the cedar-clad Middle Atlas around the Berber market town of **Azrou** (p272).

Northern Morocco has always been low on the traveller's radar, but this three-week trip helps redress the balance. Sea ports, mountain villages and national parks are all part of the itinerary, with plenty of virgin hiking territory to savour on foot.

ATLANTIC
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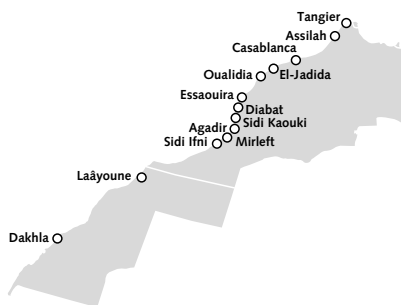
TAILORED TRIPS

ATLANTIC ADVENTURE

Morocco's Atlantic seaboard takes you from the clamour of the north to the deserted coastline of the south.

Take the ferry from Spain to **Tangier** (p169), at once a quintessentially Moroccan mosaic and a decadent outpost of Europe. Catch the train south, first to artsy **Assilah** (p139), which is loaded with whitewashed charms, and then to **Casablanca** (p100) with its melange of art deco and skyscrapers. Follow Casa's suburbanites to **El-Jadida** (p144) then visit **Oualidia** (p149), a St Tropez lookalike grafted onto the African coast and arrayed around a perfect crescent lagoon. Further down the coast, **Essaouira** (p153) may have been discovered long ago, but its white-walled ramparts, bohemian beat and renovated riads have that special something that makes travellers stay longer than they planned. The peaceful beaches of **Diabat** (p166) and **Sidi Kaouki** (p166) are close at hand.

For family-friendly beaches head on to **Agadir** (p375) or escape the crowds further south in **Mirleft** (p395) or **Sidi Ifni** (p396). If you're heading south to Mauritania, break your journey at **Laäyoune** (p411), the biggest city in the Sahara, and then **Dakhla** (p414).



WORLD HERITAGE SITES

Morocco has eight Unesco World Heritage-listed sites (<http://whc.unesco.org>) which provide some excellent focal points around which to build your Moroccan journey.

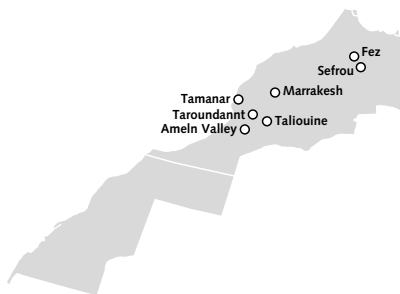
The jewel in the crown is the vast, living, ramshackle museum that is the **Fez medina** (p232), the first Moroccan site to be inscribed on the list. The splendour of the imperial city of **Meknès** (p258) has received official recognition to match the widespread view that this is Morocco's Versailles. Nearby, the Roman city of **Volubilis** (p266), with its astonishing mosaics left *in situ*, suggests that this region has always inspired world-class architects.

To the north, the splendid medina at **Tetouan** (p195) is not your ordinary Moroccan medina due to the strong Andalusian overtones. From Tetouan, head for the coast and down past Casablanca to **El-Jadida** (p144) where the enchanting Portuguese port yields many surprises. Continuing down the coast, the medina at **Essaouira** (p158) is also deservedly on the list. To prove that world heritage doesn't have to mean monumental buildings, break your journey in Marrakesh, where the carnival-like hubbub of the square **Djemma el-Fna** (p298), which Unesco has dubbed a 'Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity'. The **medina** (p298) is listed for more traditional reasons. Over the Atlas, the **ksar of Ait Benhaddou** (p339) was chosen to represent the extraordinary mud brick architecture of the south – a final worthy inclusion.



A MOROCCAN CULINARY TOUR

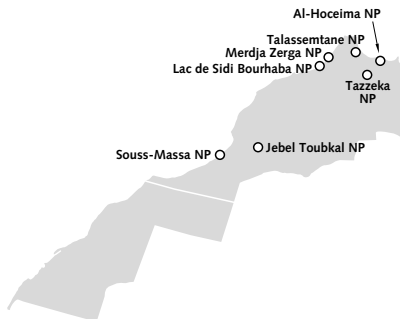
Morocco's culinary capital of Fez offers pleasures that travellers of all budgets can enjoy, from the local *b'sara* (a butterbean and garlic soup) and snails served at **stalls** (p249) all over town to some of the splendid riad restaurants like **Dar Roumana** (p248). The nearby small Berber town of Sefrou is worth a visit in June for its annual **Cherry Festival** (p254). Marrakesh is a feast in more ways than you can imagine but you can learn how to make your own at one of the **cooking schools** (p307) in the city. As you continue further south, saffron-scented Taliouine does more than produce saffron – at the **Coopérative Souktana du Safran** (p391) there's a saffron museum, saffron tasting and a saffron shop. *Mechoui* (spit-roasted lamb) is a High Atlas speciality, so pause in Taroudannt at **Jnane Soussia** (p390) before continuing on your way. At Tamarar, located 80km north of Agadir, make for **Coopérative Amal** (p165), where they'll tell and show you everything you need to know about argan oil, which is unique to Morocco. Away to the southeast, the villages of the **Ameln Valley** (p406) are known for their food festivals; if you're here in late February, the **almond harvest** (p402) around Tafraoute is a wonderfully food-focused celebration, although the delicious *amlou* (honey-and-almond paste made with argan oil) is available year-round. For regional Moroccan specialities, see *Been There, Eaten That*, p80.



NATIONAL PARKS

Many trips to Morocco revolve around the inevitable axis of the imperial cities, taking in a camel trip to see the Sahara. But Moroccan landscapes revolve around more than just minarets and sand dunes, and there are some great national parks to be explored.

Easy to reach from Marrakesh, the national park at **Jebel Toubkal** (p425) takes you straight into the High Atlas mountains for some dramatic scenery and the chance to climb Mt Toubkal, North Africa's highest mountain. Southeast from here and near Agadir, **Souss-Massa National Park** (p384) is a more varied park, with a mix of estuary, for birdwatching, and forest to hike in. Travelling north along the coast past Rabat, **Lac de Sidi Bourhaba** (p133) has wetlands that attract large numbers of migratory water birds, and you can also take a dip and go swimming yourself. The lagoons of nearby **Merdja Zerga National Park** (p133) at Moulay Bouselham are famous for their flamingo colonies. Heading inland, Chefchaouen is the ideal base from where you can explore **Talassemtane National Park** (p444). The Rif Mountains here are clad in oak and cedar forests, and as you trek through you stand a good chance of seeing a troop of Barbary apes. On the Mediterranean coast, the **National Park of Al-Hoceima** (p214) is also ideal hiking country, with its forests and limestone cliffs, and community-led tourism project. **Tazzeqa National Park** (p282) near Taza is the last on the circuit, with striking Middle Atlas scenery of pretty waterfalls, and birdlife.



The Authors



PAUL CLAMMER **Coordinating Author, Destination Morocco, Getting Started, Itineraries, Environment, Imperial Cities, Directory, Transport**

As a student, Paul had his first solo backpacking experience when he took a bus from his Cambridgeshire home all the way to Casablanca. Morocco instantly enchanted him. After an interlude when he trained and worked as a molecular biologist, he eventually returned to work as a tour guide, trekking in the Atlas and trying not to lose passengers in the Fez medina. He returns on a regular basis both for Lonely Planet and recreation, and is currently fighting the temptation to buy an old medina town house to restore into a more permanent bolthole.

ALISON BING

History, Culture, Arts & Architecture, Crafts, Food & Drink, Marrakesh & Central Morocco

Alison's first crush was on the Sufi poet Rumi, after visiting his shrine in Turkey and being favourably impressed with the architecture and all that whirling. Not much has changed since she was five, taste-wise, but now that she's studied Islamic art, architecture and political economy at the American University in Cairo and Bryn Mawr College, she can explain her predilections in complete sentences.

Alison also holds a Master's degree from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, a joint program of Tufts and Harvard Universities, and regularly undermines those diplomatic credentials with opinionated travel, art, food and culture commentaries for newspapers, magazines and radio.



ANTHONY SATTIN

Atlantic Coast, The Souss, Anti Atlas & Western Sahara, Trekking

Anthony is a writer and broadcaster with a love of literature, travel and North Africa. A Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, he has travelled widely and has written for many national and international publications. He is a regular contributor of features and criticism to the *Sunday Times* and was recently voted one of the 10 key influences on travel writing. He has written several books on North Africa, the most recent being *The Gates of Africa*, an account of early European exploration. His radio work has included several documentaries about Morocco, the most recent being about Marrakesh for BBC Radio 4.

LONELY PLANET AUTHORS

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PAUL STILES

Mediterranean Coast & the Rif

Paul lives in the Canary Islands, beneath Mt Teide, the tallest peak in the Atlantic Ocean. On a clear day, it is possible to see the roof of Morocco from the summit. When he climbed up there, however, it was not a clear day, so he had to jump on a plane and see for himself, something he has wanted to do ever since driving a motorcycle around Tunisia. When not escaping modern life, Paul writes about it. His latest book, *Is the American Dream Killing You?*, was more than a little related to his current choice of domicile – where the answer is ‘no’.

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