

Sunset at Marrakech's main market square Jemaa el Fna



THE WEEKENDER

# MARRAKECH

Don't just hang out in the Medina, there's way more to this Moroccan city, says **Olivia Palamountain**

It's fair to say that Marrakech does not do things in moderation. A celebration of the senses set to a soundtrack of daily calls to prayer, this beguiling destination is beautifully and unapologetically in your face. From pyramids of rainbow spices in the souks and the buzz of vendors driving a hard bargain, to architectural wonders and heady wafts of orange blossom and jasmine in the air, Marrakech is ready to seduce at every turn. Adored by the French, there's more than a hint of 'je ne sais quoi' about the place and glorious leftovers from the colonial era, such as excellent pâtisserie, wide boulevards and continental cafés. Visitors are always lured to the ancient medina but there's plenty more to explore in modern neighbourhoods like Gueliz, and adventures to be had in the desert. Rock the kasbah – you know you want to.



ABOVE: Royal Mansour  
BELOW: Riad Farnatchi



## STAY

There are hotels and then there is Royal Mansour. This magnificent property offers guests the luxury of a private riad with all the trappings of a five-star hotel. More authentic accommodation can be found slap-bang inside the medina. Riad Farnatchi is one of the most established options, a charming guesthouse and spa run by Brits with years of experience in the industry and who love Marrakech almost as much as the locals.

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

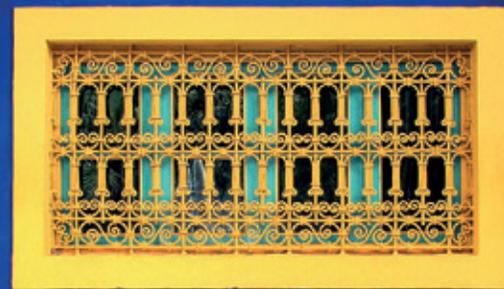


## BUY

It's impossible not to come home with the contents of the souks. Colourful babouches, beni ourain rugs and embroidered baskets are everywhere, but for something unique, head to Chez Monsieur Michelin aka Thierry Coudert. An upcycling specialist, Thierry creates things like bags, jewellery and insane Atsuko Kudo-style rubber lingerie from the glossy, black inner tubes of bicycles, employing women and students who need an income to support themselves. Sexy and ethical – result. French-Algerian designer Nyora Nemiche is a next generation medina designer selling gorgeous silk kaftans and abayas from a miniature shop in the Le Jardin restaurant, as bought by Kate Moss and Juliette Binoche. It's worth checking out online the ethical label Bombom Morocco for their divine handmade in Marrakech bags and pompom sliders (*from £70. bombommorocco*).



Bombom Morocco



## THE FINER DETAILS

### LIVE LIKE A LOCAL...

There are no price tags in the medina so you will need to haggle for everything. As a rule of thumb never pay more than 50 per cent of the asking price and don't be embarrassed to drive a hard bargain – chances are you're still being ripped off but it's all a bit of fun.

### WHATEVER YOU DO...

Take plenty of spare space in your suitcase to load up on shopping – or invest in some beautiful leather luggage when you arrive.

### BOOK IT

Stay at Royal Mansour, from £782 per night, including breakfast (*royalmansour.com*). Stay at Riad Farnatchi, from £270, including breakfast and airport transfers (*riadfarnatchi.com*).



ABOVE: Magical Jardin Majorelle  
BELOW: Marrakech Insiders offers sidecar roadsters for desert safaris

## SEE

Most tourists head straight for the ancient medina but modern neighbourhoods such as hip Gueliz are also worth exploring. Full of boutiques and cafés, it's also buzzing with art galleries such as the Matisse, which exhibits the best artists from all over the country in its lovely villa location. On a sweltering day you can't beat a stroll through one of Marrakech's famed gardens and Jardin Marjorelle, with its enchanting lanes, magical plants and tranquil streams, is one of the most impressive. Designed in the 1920s by the French painter Jacques Majorelle, it was later restored by Yves Saint Laurent and his partner Pierre Bergé. There's even a shade of blue – Marjorelle Blue – trademarked in his name. Wander west through the medina to the Jewish Quarter and lose yourself in the beauty of the Bahia Palace, a 19th-century complex full of intriguing design details, each of which tells its own story. To make the most of the experience, pick up an official local guide such as Youssef Rharrab, as recommended by Royal Mansour, who will bring the fascinating history of Islamic art and culture to life on a walking tour of the city. Fancy a desert safari with a twist? Hop into one of Marrakech Insiders groovy sidecar roadsters and roar into the mountains for an unforgettable desert safari – with lunch at the stunning Terres des Étoiles glampsite.



Eat at Le Trou au Mur for forgotten Moroccan dishes

## EAT

Royal Mansour offers destination dining of the highest calibre. Highly recommended is the new pool restaurant, an alfresco oasis serving elegant sushi, salads and barbecue – and an out-of-this-world mojito concocted with homemade lemon sorbet. New for this year at Riad Farnatchi is Le Trou au Mur, a restaurant serving up delicacies of forgotten Moroccan cuisine (tripe with white beans and spiced tomato, anyone?) alongside British comfort food. Snuggle by the fire in winter or try the rooftop terrace. Elsewhere in the medina Madame Alami makes the best Moroccan pastries, so it's worth the adventure to find her in the souks. Over in Gueliz, Le Grand Café de La Poste will charm your socks off with its fireplace, Berber rugs, club chairs and menu of French-Moroccan classics.