

Marrakech

By Norwegian

Exotic, stylish and out-there: all words used to describe Morocco's coolest city. From fashion and shopping to gourmet meals in a petrol station – we've got the Red City covered

Words by Paige Darrah



The souvenir / ARTISAN FOOTBALLS

Marrakech's tannery is often referred to as the "Moroccan Wall Street", thanks to the kaftan-clad men clutching wads of dirhams who yell figures at each other in Arabic. The den's dirt floor is layered with stacks of clean, raw hides that artisans in the medina turn into babouches, pouffe chairs, iPad covers and footballs. To bring home one of the latter, visit the Boukentar family in their 8m² workshop, La Clinique du Ballon. They've been reproducing vintage football patterns using calf leather from the adjacent tannery since 1965. "We're the only football artisans left in Morocco," says Kamal Boukentar, whose 10-year-old twin boys are being groomed to run the family business. fabrique-ballon-maroc.jimdo.com



The basics

- Marrakech is a former capital of Morocco, founded in 1062
- Today it's Morocco's fourth largest city with 1m inhabitants
- It's split into two main parts: a 12th-century medina (old town) and French-constructed Nouvelle Ville (new town)
- It's known as the "Red City" for the medina's clay ramparts
- Norwegian flies to Marrakech from Oslo, Stockholm, Copenhagen, Helsinki and Madrid



The key areas

Medina: Djemâa el-Fna

Impossible to pronounce and even harder to miss, Marrakech's main square is a sprawl of henna-tattoo ladies, selfie-taking monkeys and acrobats with Cirque du Soleil dexterity. At sundown, the square morphs into a giant open-air restaurant.



Medina: Kaât Bennahid

Donkey-pulled carts ramble through the narrow terracotta *derbs* (alleys) of this nascent neighbourhood just north of the souks. Look out for new art galleries and the area's second wine-serving restaurant, Le Trou au Mur, which opened last month. letrouaumur.com



Medina: Mouassine

Enter this chicest of medina quarters through Bab Fteuh gate, just north of the Djemâa el-Fna. Follow Derb Aârjane to popular hammam Place des Épices. Scenes from the unfortunate *Sex and the City II* were filmed here, but don't let that put you off. spadesepices.com



Le Guéliz

Middle-class Marrakechis and expats gather in this rather spiffy north-western neighbourhood for its wine bars, concept stores and art galleries. Cool cats congregate at Casa Jose and Le Grand Café de la Poste. grupocasajose.com, grandcafedelaposte.com, restaurant



Nouvelle Ville: L'Hivernage

Get your groove on in one of this area's busy night spots. Sofitel's SO Lounge – where French rapper Kaaris is a stage regular – is much loved by locals and expats alike. A gaggle of belly dancers and cobras have a standing nightly appointment at Le Comptoir. sofitel.com, comptoirmarrakech.com



The postcard

THE CINEMATIC ATLAS

If you think this view is familiar then maybe you've seen *Game of Thrones*, *The Mummy*, or *Gladiator*? How about *The Man Who Would Be King*, *Jewel of the Nile* or *The Living Daylights*? Take any major movie and TV franchise with an "eastern" influence and chances are some of it will have been filmed in the fortified village (*ksar*) of Ait Benhaddou in Ouarzazate. It's both a big hit with Hollywood, and a popular day trip from the city – if only for Lawrence of Arabia or Daenerys Targaryen selfies. onthegotours.com

Death Star
in arrivals?



The front of Menara Airport's new terminal bears a striking resemblance to Darth Vader's space station. Opened in December 2016, Terminal 2 doubled RAK's annual passenger capacity to nine million. Exit through a 30m-tall sphere created by transparent, triangle-shaped solar panels, which are in turn made from photovoltaic modules that help to generate power. Proof that Casablanca-based architect Abdou Lahlou excelled in geometry class. lahlouarchi.com



The face /

AMINE BENDRIOUICH AT ABCB

Known around these parts for his unisex collections of sardonic T-shirts, cashmere sweaters and silk bomber jackets, Amine Bendriouich's eponymous fashion label ABCB is moving beyond the pop-up platform and into its first permanent shop, adjacent to the medina's ever-popular La Terrasse des Épices café this month. The 32-year-old designer has noticed a shift over the past few years: "Young Moroccans today are more interested in their cultural identity. Now you see guys going out to clubs wearing babouches [traditional, pointy slippers] with their suits." amine.bendriouich.com

The shopping /



CHABI CHIC

Nadia Noël's quirky homewares can now be found in three haggle-free boutiques. We love her little "pochettes" (zippered pouches), hand-stitched with satirical Moroccan sayings. chabi-chic.com



DAR CHRIFA LAMARNIA

"I see Picasso and Dalí when I sleep," says ageing artist Chrif, who's been painting since he was seven. His atelier's trippy neon pink-and-green canvases bring a welcome pop of colour to the Kaât Bennahid neighbourhood. 11 Zaouit Lahdar



33 RUE MAJORELLE

This concept store in Ville Nouvelle has its tongue firmly in cheek. Pick up some Arabic Pop-Art greeting cards, up-and-coming designer clobber and cheeky T-shirts, hats and slippers.

33ruemajorelle.com

Fill up here



Bow-tied waiters, silver tea services and free-range chicken aren't your usual petrol station offering, but Station Al Baraka isn't your usual petrol station. On any afternoon outside Ramadan, locals flock to its beige-pink terrace in the desert-like Palmeraie district (east out of the city on Route de Fes) for coveted tagines of Beldi chicken with preserved lemon, olives and onions, with wood-baked Tafarnout bread and Al Baraka's famous fries.



The building / MUSÉE YVES SAINT LAURENT MARRAKECH

This impressive brick tribute to Yves Saint Laurent – arguably Marrakech's most famous adopted son – opened last month, giving fashionistas a new place of pilgrimage in the city. Its low-rise, earth-coloured façade has been designed to reference the subtle threads of the designer's work while simultaneously blending into the muted colours of the landscape. Inside the 4,000m² space, there's clothing, sketches, collection boards and couture accessories, all curated by the designer's lover and business partner Pierre Bergé, who passed away this September. Browse YSL's seminal works like Le Smoking (his ladies' tuxedo) and the Safari Jacket, along with retro photographs of the artist in 1960s Morocco. A separate exhibition room will feature works from Moroccan artists; and there's a French café called Le Studio. [museeyslmarraekch.com](https://www.museeyslmarraekch.com)



The kids /

BEATS BURGER

If saffron couscous is a bit of a leap for your youngsters, this gourmet burger joint in the souks will please the pickiest eater – it even serves chicken nuggets. It's decorated with vintage vinyl record covers, and they write the name of the burger, such as Baby One More Beat, on the plate in harissa-spiced mayonnaise.

[facebook.com/beatsburgermarrakech](https://www.facebook.com/beatsburgermarrakech)



The stay /

RIAD EL FENN

The name means "house of art" in Arabic, and rightfully so – work by Jackson Pollock and Hassan Hajjaj covers the halls of this 21-suite hotel. Lounging in one of the hammock-filled courtyards is encouraged, or join the swans on El Fenn's rooftop terrace and stare at Koutoubia Mosque's minaret, glass of Moroccan Val d'Argan Sauvignon Blanc in hand. [el-fenn.com](https://www.el-fenn.com)

Hayat
zouina!!!

**Learn Arabic
(God willing)**



Marrakechis are accomplished linguists, and many of those you meet will speak English. Nevertheless they get very excited when outsiders try to speak Arabic. Even the smallest effort will be met with great enthusiasm in the souks, so try some of these phrases: "Labs?" (How's it going?) "Hayat zouina" (Life is beautiful) and "Inch'allah" (God willing). The latter is uttered during virtually every conversation, and can be used as a universal escape clause.



The drink /

MORROQUITO

A mojito but not as you know it. Le Foundouk restaurant's version of the Carribean drink uses local fig alcohol instead of rum; Moroccans are really into figs. foundouk.com



The spa /

FARNATCHI SPA

Hammams are everywhere in Marrakech - a welcome flipside to the in-your-face, moped-ridden mania of the souks. Some of the older ones tend to be dark and dungeon-esque but Farnatchi - which opened in 2016 - is airy and calm. Traditional cream-coloured, hand-carved plasterwork and stylish photography dominate the massage suites. A skinny man called Ahmed has truly healing hands. Possibly the best massage ever.

farnatchispa.com

The chef / SANA GAMAS

"In the beginning of my career, there were practically no female Moroccan chefs doing international cuisine - that was only for men," says chef Sana Gamas, who's been pushing through the glass ceiling in Marrakech's food scene for 15 years. Starting at Bô Zin, she spent time at La Mamounia's restaurant, and was involved in Café de la Poste's reopening in 2005, where she helped create a typically fusion menu. "I love mixing international cuisine with Moroccan spices like argan oil and fig eau-de-vie," says the chef, who now heads up the kitchen at Les Jardins de la Medina, earning a Gault & Millau toque this year.

lesjardinsdelamedina.com

LAMIA LAHBABI, ALAMY, GETTY, NICOLAS MATHÉUS, FARNATCHI SPA