

Morocco

Morocco is sensory overload at its most intoxicating, from the scents and sounds that permeate the medinas of Fès and Marrakesh to the astonishing sights of the landscape.

Morocco has always been a crossroads between Africa, Europe and the Middle East, and nowhere evokes this sense more than Tangier, that faded poster boy for Europe's often decadent but sometimes creative presence on Moroccan shores. From Tangier, turn south along Morocco's Atlantic Coast and you'll be accompanied by a sea breeze that massages the ramparts of wonderful cities whose names – Essaouira, Casablanca, Asilah, Rabat – and atmosphere carry a whiff of African magic. Travel east along the Mediterranean coast and you'll be bidden into enchanting towns and the mountains of the Rif.

If it's mountains you love, Morocco has them in abundance, rising from the Rif into the Middle Atlas and on into the extraordinary contours of the High Atlas. This is land custom-built for trekking as you follow quiet mountain trails amid Berber villages and fields of flowers.

Then, suddenly, everything changes. The mountains fissure into precipitous gorges the colour of the earth, mud-brick kasbahs turn blood-red with the setting sun and the sense that one has stumbled into a fairytale takes hold. From rocky fortresses such as these, the Sahara announces its presence in Morocco with perfectly sculpted seas of sand.

At journey's end, the solitude of the Sahara is ideal for contemplating why it is that Morocco has such cachet. The answer is simple: there is no place on earth quite like it.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 446,550 sq km (710,000 sq km if you include Western Sahara)
- **ATMs** Throughout the country except in small villages
- **Borders** Algeria closed; Mauritania open but no public transport
- **Budget** US\$15 to US\$25 per day
- **Capital** Rabat
- **Languages** Arabic, French, Berber
- **Money** Dirham (Dh); US\$1 = Dh8.5
- **Population** 33.2 million
- **Seasons** Hot (June to August), cold (November to February)
- **Telephone** Country code ☎ 212; international access code ☎ 00
- **Time** GMT/UTC
- **Visas** 90-day visas issued on entry for most nationalities



HIGHLIGHTS

- **Marrakesh** (p178) Dive into the clamour and endless spectacle that is Morocco's most dynamic city.
- **Fès** (p161) Lose yourself in the exotic charms of a medieval city replete with sights, sounds and smells.
- **Essaouira** (p173) Laze by the sea in Morocco's coolest and most evocative resort.
- **High Atlas** (p185) Trek deep into a world of stunning scenery and isolated Berber villages.
- **Drâa Valley** (p186) Explore Morocco's richest collection of kasbahs and then soak up the solitude of the Sahara.

CLIMATE & 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. At other times, don'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. The north coast and the Rif Mountains are frequently wet and cloudy in winter and early spring.

Apart from the weather, the timing of Ramadan (the traditional Muslim month of fasting and purification, which occurs during September or October depending on the calendar) is another important consideration as some restaurants and cafés close during the day and general business hours are reduced.

ITINERARIES

- **Two Weeks** From Tangier (p151), head to Tetouan (p156) or the mountains around chilled-out Chefchaouen (p157), where you'll end up staying longer than you planned. Then make a beeline for Fès (p161) and Marrakesh (p178), imperial cities in the Moroccan interior that deserve as much time as you can spare. If you've time, a detour to artsy Essaouira (p173) is a wonderful way to step down a gear after the onslaught of Morocco's most clamorous cities.
- **One Month** Follow the itinerary above, but on your way south check out cosmopolitan Casablanca (p169), imperial Rabat (p147) or laid-back Asilah (p169), depending on your inclination. Save time

HOW MUCH?

- **Dorm bed** US\$3.40 to US\$5
- **Pot of mint tea** US\$0.60
- **Museum admission** US\$1.20
- **Hamamm** US\$1.20
- **Petit-taxi ride** US\$1.20

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L petrol** US\$1.20
- **1L bottled water** US\$0.60
- **Bottle of flag** US\$0.50 to US\$0.70
- **Souvenir T-shirt** US\$12
- **Grilled brochette** US\$3.40 to US\$4.50

also for a detour to Meknès (p166) while you're in Fès. Count on a three-day round trip from Marrakesh to trek up Jebel Toubkal (p185), and four or five days to explore Ait Benhaddou (p186), Todra Gorge (p188), Dadès Gorge (p188), the Drâa Valley (p186) and the sand dunes around Merzouga (p189).

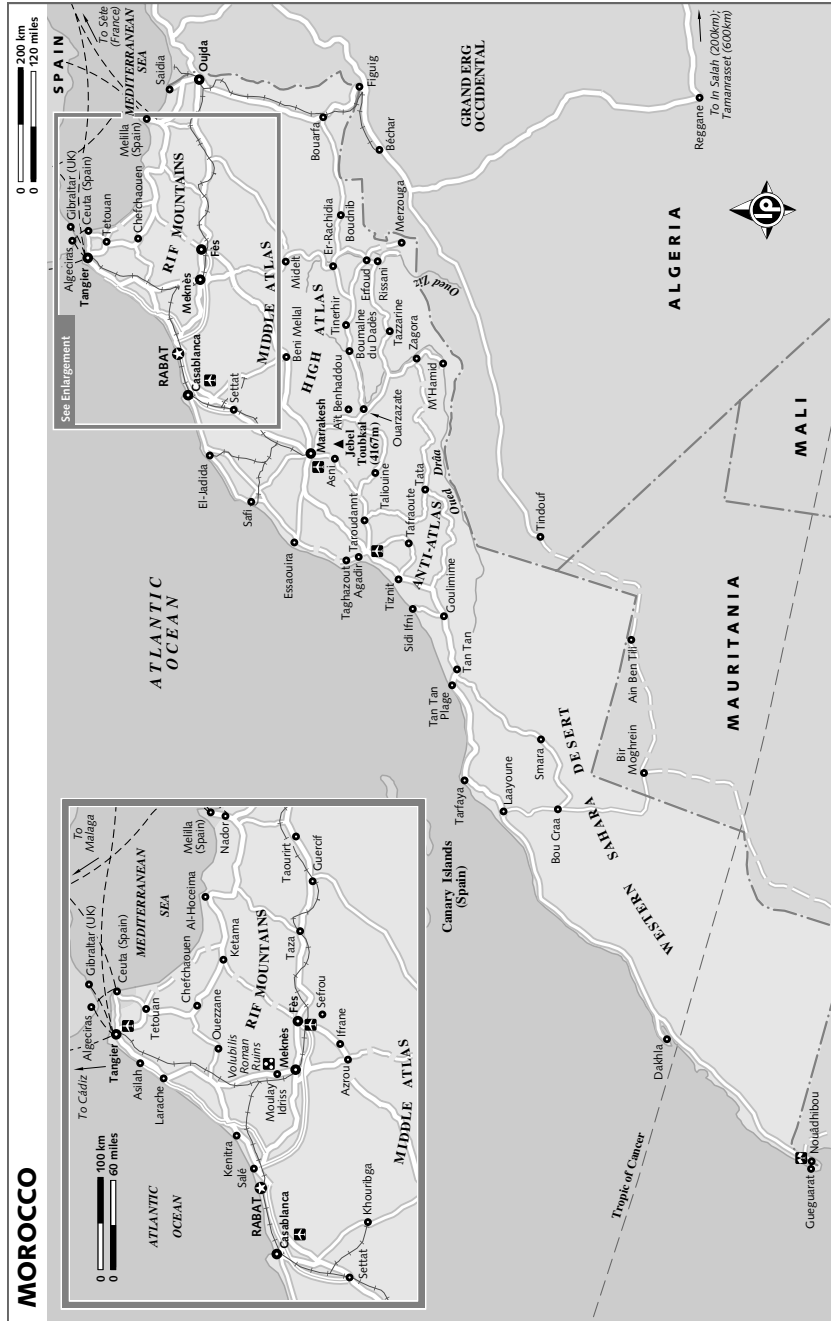
HISTORY

Live Free or Die Trying: The Berbers

Morocco's first-known inhabitants were Near Eastern nomads who may have been distant cousins of the ancient Egyptians. Phoenicians appear to have arrived around 800 BC, and when the Romans arrived in the 4th century BC, they called the expanse of Morocco and western Algeria 'Mauretania' and the indigenous people 'Berbers', meaning 'barbarians'.

In the 1st century AD, the Romans built up Volubilis into a city of 20,000 (mostly Berber) people, but, fed up with the persistently unruly Berbers, the Roman emperor Caligula declared the end of Berber autonomy in North Africa in AD 40. But whereas the Vandals and Byzantines failed to oust the Romans from their home turf, Berbers in the Rif and the Atlas ultimately succeeded through a campaign of near-constant harassment – a tactic that would later put the squeeze on many an unpopular Moroccan sultan.

As Rome slipped into decline, the Berbers harried and hassled any army that dared to invade to the point where the Berbers were free to do as they pleased.



MOROCCO

MOROCCO

MOROCCO

Islamic Morocco

In the second half of the 7th century, the soldiers of the Prophet Mohammed set forth from the Arabian Peninsula and overwhelmed the peoples of North Africa. Within a century, nearly all Berber tribes had embraced Islam, although, true to form, local tribes developed their own brand of Islamic Shi'ism, which sparked rebellion against the eastern Arabs.

By 829, local elites had established an Idrisid state with its capital at Fès, dominating all of Morocco. Thus commenced a cycle of rising and falling Islamic dynasties, which included the Almoravids (1062–1147), who built their capital at Marrakesh; the Almohads (1147–1269), famous for building the Koutoubia Mosque (p179); the Merenids (1269–1465), known for their exquisite mosques and *madrassas* (Quranic schools), especially in Fès; the Saadians (1524–1659), responsible for the Palais el-Badi (p179) in Marrakesh; and the Alawites (1659–present).

France took control in 1912, making its capital at Rabat and handing Spain a token zone in the north. Opposition from Berber mountain tribes was officially crushed, but continued to simmer away and moved into political channels with the development of the Istiqlal (independence) party.

Royal Morocco

Under increasing pressure from Moroccans and the Allies, France allowed Mohammed V to return from exile in 1955, and Morocco successfully negotiated its independence from France and Spain in 1956.

When Mohammed V died suddenly of heart failure in 1961, King Hassan II became the leader of the new nation. Hassan II consolidated power by crackdowns on dissent and suspending parliament for a decade. With heavy borrowing and an ever-expanding bureaucracy, Morocco was deeply in debt by the 1970s. In 1973, the phosphate industry in the Spanish Sahara started to boom. Morocco staked its claim to the area and its lucrative phosphate reserves with the 350,000-strong Green March into Western Sahara in 1975, settling the area with Moroccans while greatly unsettling indigenous Sahrawi people agitating for self-determination.

Such grand and patriotic flourishes notwithstanding, the growing gap between the rich and the poor ensured that dissent remained widespread across a broad cross-section of

Moroccan society. Protests against price rises in 1981 prompted a brutal government crackdown, but sustained pressure from human rights activists achieved unprecedented results in 1991, when Hassan II founded the Truth & Reconciliation Commission to investigate human rights abuses that occurred during his own reign – a first for a king.

Morocco Today

Hassan II died in 1999 and Morocco held its breath. In his first public statement as king, Mohammed VI vowed to right the wrongs of the era known to Moroccans as 'the Black Years'. Today, Morocco's human rights record is arguably the cleanest in Africa and the Middle East, though still not exactly spotless – repressive measures were revived after 9/11 and the 2003 Casablanca bombings. But the Commission has nonetheless helped cement human rights advances by awarding reparations to 9280 victims of the Black Years, and the new parliament elected in 2002 has implemented some promising reforms. Foremost among these are Morocco's first-ever municipal elections, the introduction of Berber languages in some state schools, and the much-anticipated Mudawanna, a legal code protecting women's rights to divorce and custody.

CULTURE

Moroccans cast their eye in many directions – to Europe, the economically dominant neighbour; to the east and the lands of Islam; and to its traditional Berber heartland. The result is an intoxicating blend of the modern and the traditional, the liberal and the conservative, hospitality and the need to make a dirham. Away from the tourist scrum, a Moroccan proverb tells the story – 'A guest is a gift from Allah'. The public domain may belong to men, but they're just as likely to invite you home to meet the family. If this happens, consider yourself truly privileged but remember: keep your left hand firmly out of the communal dish and feel free to slurp your tea and belch your appreciation loudly.

In present-day Morocco, *jellabas* (flowing cloaks) cover Western suits, turbans jostle with baseball caps, European dance music competes with sinuous Algerian rai and mobile phones ring in the midst of perhaps the greatest of all Moroccan pastimes – the serious and exuberant art of conversation. An inherently social

people, Moroccans have a heightened sense of mischief, love a good laugh and will take your decision to visit their country as an invitation to talk...and drink tea, and perhaps buy a carpet, a very beautiful carpet, just for the pleasure of your eyes...

PEOPLE

People of Arab-Berber descent make up almost 100% of Morocco's population, which is mainly rural (about 60%) and young (70% are under 30 years). With a growth rate of 2.2%, the population will double almost every 25 years.

Ninety-nine percent of Moroccans are Muslim. Muslims share their roots with Jews and Christians and respect these groups as *Ahl al-Kteb* (People of the Book). Fundamentalism is mostly discouraged but remains a presence, especially among the urban poor who have enjoyed none of the benefits of economic growth. That said, the majority of Muslims do not favour such developments and the popularity of fundamentalism is not as great as Westerners imagine.

Emigration to France, Israel and the US has reduced Morocco's once robust Jewish community to approximately 7000 from a high of around 300,000 in 1948. The Jewish communities that once inhabited the historic *mellahs* (Jewish quarters) of Fès, Marrakesh, Safi, Essaouira and Meknès have largely relocated to Casablanca.

ARTS & CRAFTS

Architecture

Moroccan religious buildings are adorned with hand-carved detailing, gilded accents, chiselled mosaics and an array of other decorative flourishes. A mosque consists of a courtyard, an arched portico and a main prayer hall facing Mecca. Great examples include the 9th-century Kairaouine Mosque (p161) in Fès and the colossal Hassan II Mosque (p170) in Casablanca. While all but the latter are closed to non-Muslims, the *madrassas* that bejewel major Moroccan cities are open for visits.

Although religious architecture dominates, Casablanca in particular boasts local architectural features grafted onto whitewashed European edifices in a distinctive crossroads style that might be described as Islamic geometry meets Art Deco.

The street façade of the Moroccan riads (traditional courtyard houses; also called

dars) usually conceals an inner courtyard that allows light to penetrate during the day and cool air to settle at night. Many classy guesthouses occupy beautifully renovated traditional riads.

Music

The most renowned Berber folk group is the Master Musicians of Jajouka, who famously inspired the Rolling Stones and collaborated with them on some truly experimental fusion. Lately the big names are women's, namely the all-female group B'net Marrakech and the bold Najat Aatabou, who sings protest songs in Berber against restrictive traditional roles. Joyously bluesy with a rhythm you can't refuse, Gnaoua music, which began among freed slaves in Marrakesh and Essaouira, may send you into a trance and that's just what it's meant to do. To sample the best in Gnaoua, head to Essaouira on the third weekend in June for the Gnaoua & World Music Festival (p192). Rai, originally from Algeria, is one of the strongest influences on Moroccan contemporary music, incorporating elements of jazz, hip-hop and rap. A popular artist is Cheb Mami, famous for vocals on Sting's 'Desert Rose'.

ENVIRONMENT

Morocco's three ecological zones – coast, mountain and desert – host more than 40 different ecosystems and provide habitat for many endemic species, including the iconic and sociable Barbary macaque (also known as the Barbary ape). Unfortunately, the pressure upon these ecosystems from ever-more-sprawling urban areas and the encroachment of industrialisation in Morocco's wilderness has ensured that 18 mammals (a staggering 15% of the total) and 11 bird species are considered endangered.

Pollution, desertification, overgrazing and deforestation are the major environmental issues among many facing the Moroccan government. Despite plantation programmes and the development of new national parks, less than 0.05% of Moroccan territory is protected, one-third of Morocco's ecosystems are disappearing, 10% of vertebrates are endangered and 25,000 hectares of forest are lost every year.

FOOD & DRINK

Influenced by Berber, Arabic and Mediterranean traditions, Moroccan cuisine features a sublime use of spices and fresh produce.

It would be a culinary crime to skip breakfast in Morocco. Sidewalk cafés and kiosks put a local twist on a Continental breakfast with Moroccan pancakes and doughnuts, French pastries, coffee and mint tea. Follow your nose into the *souqs*, where you'll find tangy olives and local *jiben* (fresh goat's or cow's milk cheeses) to be devoured with fresh *khoobz* (Moroccan-style pita bread baked in a wood-fired oven).

Lunch is traditionally the biggest meal of the day in Morocco. The most typical Moroccan dish is *tajine*, a meat and vegetable stew cooked slowly in an earthenware dish. Couscous, fluffy steamed semolina served with tender meat and vegetables, is another staple. Fish dishes also make an excellent choice in coastal areas, while *harira* is a thick soup made from lamb stock, lentils, chickpeas, onions, tomatoes, fresh herbs and spices. *Pastilla*, a speciality of Fès, includes poultry (chicken or pigeon), almonds, cinnamon, saffron and sugar, encased in layer upon layer of very fine pastry.

Vegetarians shouldn't have any problems – fresh fruit and vegetables are widely available, as are lentils and chickpeas. Salads are ubiquitous in Morocco, particularly the traditional *salade marocaine* made from diced green peppers, tomatoes and red onion. Ask for your couscous or *tajine sans viande* (without meat).

For dessert, Moroccan patisseries concoct excellent French and Moroccan sweets. Local sweets include flaky pastries rich with nuts and aromatic traces of orange-flower water. Another variation is a *bastilla* (multilayer pastry) with toasted almonds, cinnamon and cream.

Café culture is alive and well in Morocco and mint tea, the legendary 'Moroccan whisky', is made with Chinese gunpowder tea, fresh mint and copious sugar. Fruit juices, especially freshly squeezed orange juice, are the country's greatest bargain. It's not advisable to drink tap water in Morocco. Beer's easy to find in the *villes nouvelles* (new towns) – local brands include Stork or Flag.

RABAT

pop 1.7 million

Relaxed, well-kept and very European, flag-waving Rabat is just as cosmopolitan as Casablanca down the coast, but lacks the frantic pace and grimy feel of its economic big brother. Its elegant tree-lined boulevards and imposing administrative buildings exude an

unhurried, diplomatic and hassle-free charm that many travellers grow to like.

ORIENTATION

Ave Hassan II divides the medina from the Ville Nouvelle and follows the line of the medina walls to the Oued Bou Regreg, the river that separates the twin cities of Rabat and Salé. The city's main thoroughfare – the wide, palm-lined Ave Mohammed V – is home to many hotels, while most embassies cluster around Pl Abraham Lincoln and Ave de Fès east of the centre.

INFORMATION

American Bookshop (cnr Rues Moulay Abdelhafid & Boujaad)

BMCE (Banque Marocaine du Commerce Extérieur; Ave Mohammed V; ☎ 8am–8pm Mon–Fri) BMCE has banks and ATMs along Ave Mohammed V.

Main post office (cnr Rue Soékarno & Ave Mohammed V)

Office National Marocain du Tourisme (ONMT;

☎ 037 673756; visitmorocco@onmt.org.ma; cnr Rue Oued El Makhazine & Rue Zalaka, Agdal; ☎ 8.30am–noon & 3–6.30pm Mon–Fri)

SAMU (☎ 037 737373) Private ambulance service.

SOS Médecins (☎ 037 202020; house call US\$35;

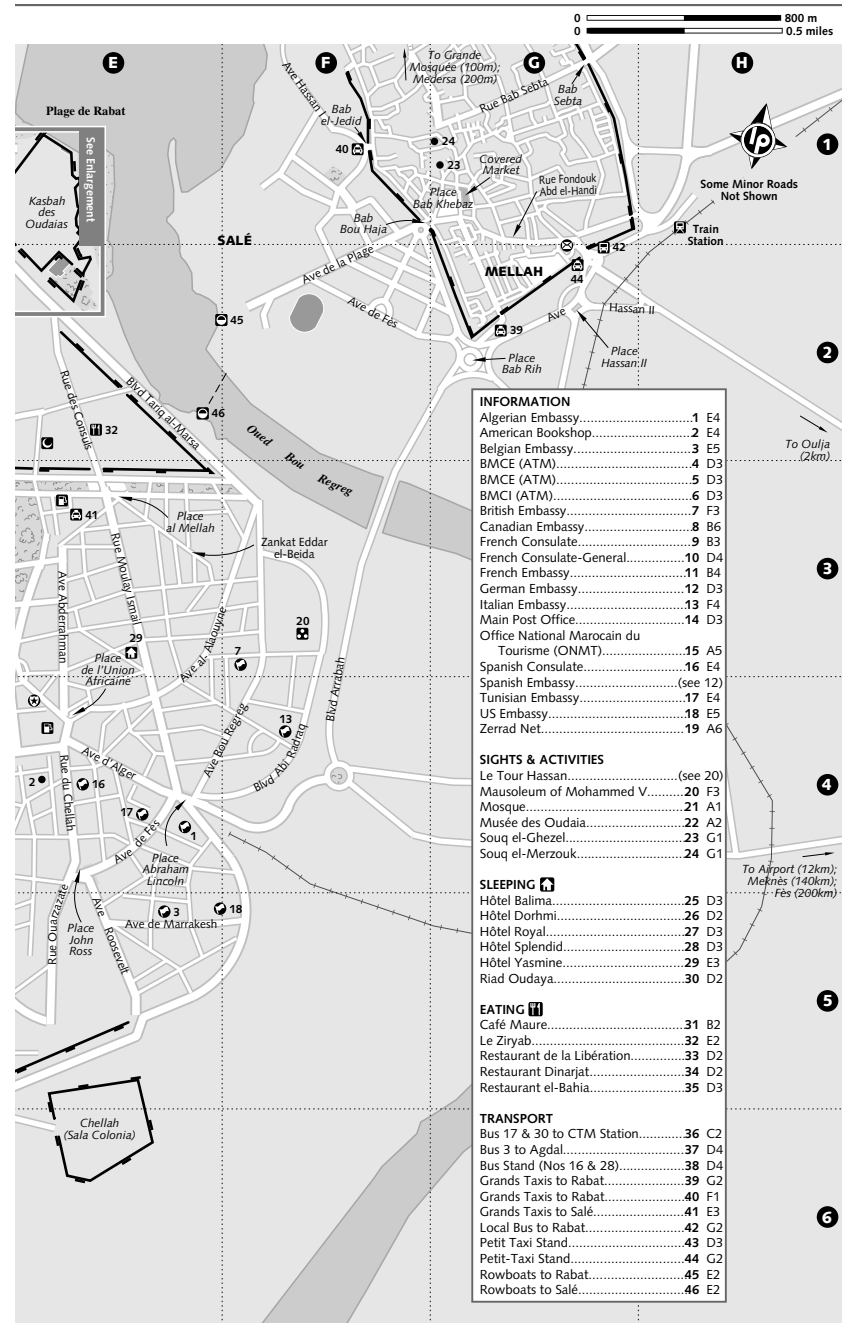
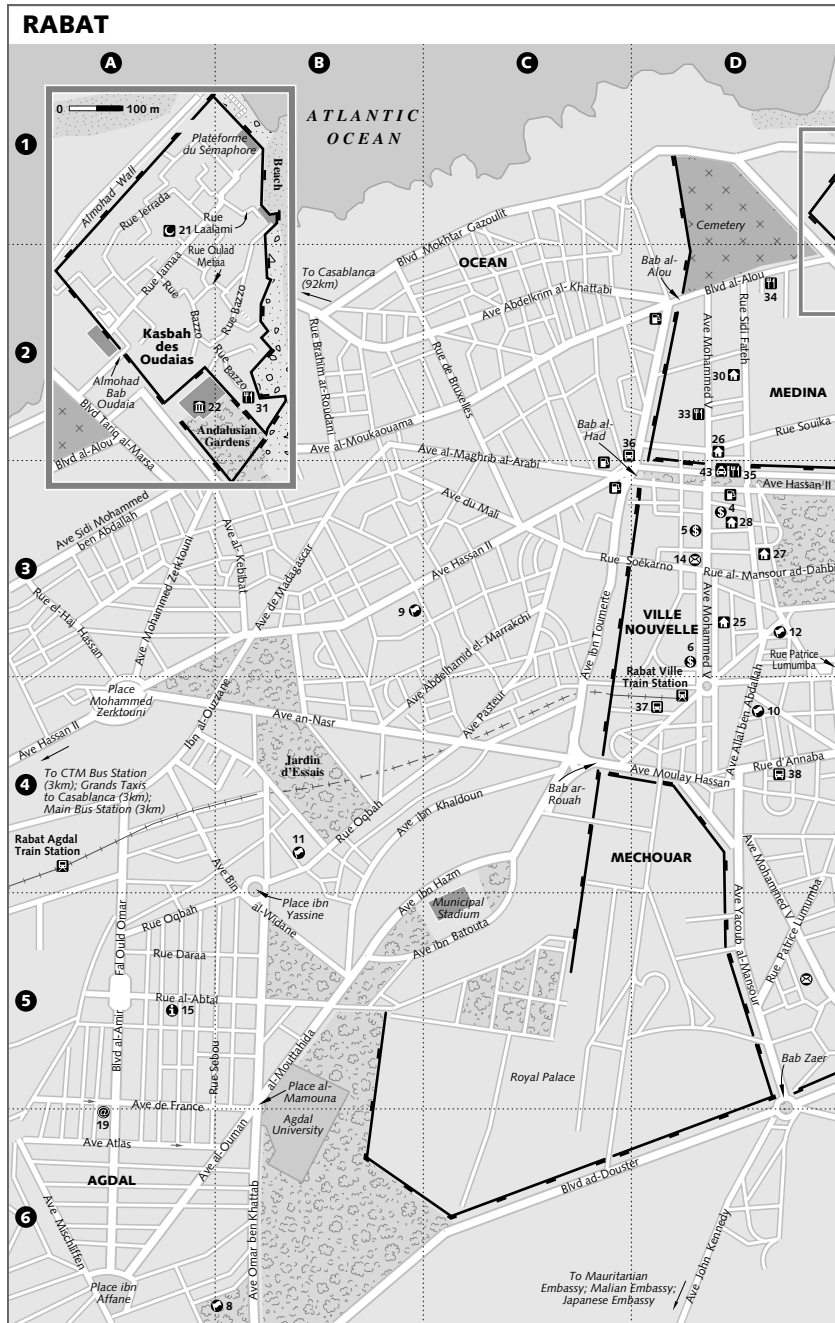
☎ 24hr) Doctors on call.

Zerrad Net (☎ 037 686723; 68 Blvd al-Amir Fal Ould Omar, Agdal; per hr US\$0.90; ☎ 8am–midnight)

SIGHTS

Dating from the 17th century, the walled *medina* isn't a patch on the medinas of Fès or Marrakesh, although it still piques the senses with its rich mixture of spices, carpets, crafts, cheap shoes and bootlegged DVDs. The **Kasbah des Oudaïas** sits high up on the bluff overlooking the Oued Bou Regreg and contains within its walls the oldest **mosque** in Rabat, which was built in the 12th century and restored in the 18th. The southern corner of the kasbah is home to the **Andalusian Gardens** (☎ sunrise–sunset), laid out by the French during the colonial period. The centrepiece is the grand 17th-century palace containing the **Musée des Oudaïa** (☎ 037 731537; admission US\$1.20; ☎ 9am–noon & 3–6pm May–Sep, 9am–noon & 3–5pm Oct–Apr).

Towering above the Oued Bou Regreg is Rabat's most famous landmark, **Le Tour Hassan** (Hassan Tower). In 1195, the Almohad sultan Yacoub al-Mansour began constructing an enormous minaret, intending to make it the highest in the Islamic world, but he died before the project was completed. Abandoned at



INFORMATION	
Algerian Embassy	1 E4
American Bookshop	2 E4
Belgian Embassy	3 E5
BMCE (ATM)	4 D3
BMCE (ATM)	5 D3
BMCI (ATM)	6 D3
British Embassy	7 F3
Canadian Embassy	8 B6
French Consulate	9 B3
French Consulate-General	10 D4
French Embassy	11 B4
German Embassy	12 D3
Italian Embassy	13 F4
Main Post Office	14 D3
Office National Marocain du Tourisme (ONMT)	15 A5
Spanish Consulate	16 E4
Tunisian Embassy	(see 12)
Tunisian Embassy	17 E4
US Embassy	18 E5
Zerrad Net	19 A6

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES	
Le Tour Hassan	(see 20)
Mausoleum of Mohammed V	20 F3
Mosque	21 A1
Musée des Oudaïa	22 A2
Souq el-Ghezel	23 G1
Souq el-Merzouk	24 G1

SLEEPING	
Hôtel Balima	25 D3
Hôtel Dorhmi	26 D2
Hôtel Royal	27 D3
Hôtel Splendid	28 D3
Hôtel Yasmine	29 E3
Riad Oudaya	30 D2

EATING	
Café Maure	31 B2
Le Ziryab	32 E2
Restaurant de la Libération	33 D2
Restaurant Dinarjat	34 D2
Restaurant el-Bahia	35 D3

TRANSPORT	
Bus 17 & 30 to CTM Station	36 C2
Bus 3 to Agdal	37 D4
Bus Stand (Nos 16 & 28)	38 D4
Grands Taxis to Rabat	39 G2
Grands Taxis to Rabat	40 F1
Grands Taxis to Salé	41 E3
Local Bus to Rabat	42 G2
Petit Taxi Stand	43 D3
Petit-Taxi Stand	44 G2
Rowboats to Rabat	45 E2
Rowboats to Salé	46 E2

44m, the beautifully designed and intricately carved tower still lords over the remains of the adjacent mosque.

The cool marble **Mausoleum of Mohammed V** (admission free; ☞ sunrise-sunset), built in traditional Moroccan style, lies opposite the tower. The present king's father (the late Hassan II) and grandfather are laid to rest here, surrounded by an intensely patterned mosaic of *zellij* (traditional tiles) from floor to ceiling.

SLEEPING

Hôtel Dorhmi (☎ 037 723898; 313 Ave Mohammed V; s/d US\$9/14, hot showers US\$1.20) Immaculately kept, very friendly and keenly priced, this family-run hotel is the best of the medina options. The simple rooms are bright and tidy and surround a central courtyard.

Hôtel Splendid (☎ 037 723283; 8 Rue Ghazza; s with/without bathroom US\$15/12, d with/without bathroom US\$21/18) Right in the heart of town, this hotel has spacious bright rooms with high ceilings, big windows, cheerful colours and simple wooden furniture. Bathrooms are new and even rooms without them have a hot-water washbasin. The hotel is set around a pleasant courtyard.

Hôtel Royal (☎ 037 721711; royal.hotel@mtds.com; 1 Rue Jeddah Ammane; s/d US\$40/45; ☐) The tastefully renovated rooms at the Royal are very comfortable with polished-wood furniture and sparkling new bathrooms. Each has a balcony overlooking the park or street.

Hôtel Yasmine (☎ 037 722018; fax 037 722100; cnr Zankat Marinyne & Mekka; s/d US\$40/53; ☐) Strong on traditional Moroccan style and popular with local business travellers, the public areas of this elegant hotel are all marble floors, *zellij* and leather furniture. The bedrooms are more mundane, but they are tasteful and comfortable.

Hôtel Balima (☎ 037 707755; fax 037 707450; Ave Mohammed V; s/d US\$47/61) The grand dame of Rabat hotels has seen better days but the rooms here are slowly being renovated. Ask for a newer room or be prepared to put up with the time-warp furniture and fabrics. The hotel has a decent restaurant, a nightclub and a glorious shady terrace facing Ave Mohammed V.

Riad Oudaya (☎ 037 702392; www.riadoudaya.com; 46 Rue Sidi Fateh; r/st US\$153/187) Tucked away down an alleyway in the medina, this gorgeous guesthouse is a real hidden gem. The rooms are beautifully decorated with a wonderful blend of Moroccan style and Western com-

fort. Subtle lighting, open fires, balconies and the gentle gurgling of the fountain in the tiled courtyard below complete the romantic appeal. Meals here are sublime.

EATING & DRINKING

Restaurant de la Libération (256 Ave Mohammed V; mains US\$3.50) Cheap, cheerful and marginally more classy than the string of other eateries along this road (it's got plastic menus and tablecloths), this basic restaurant does a steady line in traditional favourites. Friday is couscous day when giant platters of the stuff are delivered to the eager masses.

Restaurant el-Bahia (☎ 037 734504; Ave Hassan II; mains US\$4.50-8; ☞ 6am-midnight, to 10.30pm in winter) Built into the outside of the medina walls and an excellent spot for people-watching, this laid-back restaurant has the locals lapping up hearty Moroccan fare. Choose to sit in the pavement terrace, in the shaded courtyard or upstairs in the traditional salon.

Le Ziriyab (☎ 037 733636; 10 Zankat Ennajar; mains US\$10-16) This chic Moroccan restaurant is in a magnificent building just off Rue des Consuls. The blend of old-world character and stylish contemporary design is also reflected in the excellent menu of interesting variations on tajine, couscous, *pastilla* and grilled meat and fish.

Restaurant Dinarjat (☎ 037 724239; 6 Rue Belgnaoui; mains around US\$17, bottle wine US\$9) A favourite with locals and visitors alike, this traditional Moroccan restaurant is set in a 17th-century house at the heart of the medina. It's wildly fanciful with Andalucian-style palace décor and belly dancers sashaying across the lush carpets. The food is traditional Moroccan with local specialties such as *pastilla* on the menu. Book in advance.

Café Maure (Kasbah des Oudaias; ☞ 9am-5.30pm) Sit back, relax and just gaze out over the estuary to Salé from this chilled little open-air café near the Andalusian Gardens. Mint tea is the thing here, accompanied by little almond biscuits delivered on silver trays. It's an easy place to while away some time writing postcards, and a relaxed venue for women.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bus

Rabat has two bus stations: the **main bus station** (gare routière; ☎ 037 795816), where most buses depart and arrive, and the less chaotic **CTM bus station** (☎ 037 281488). Both are about 5km

southwest of the city centre on the road to Casablanca. CTM has the following services:

Destination	Fare (US\$)	Duration (hr)	Daily services
Casablanca	3.80	1½	8
Essaouira	1.70	3	3
Fès	6.50	3½	7
Marrakesh	12	5	3
Tangier	9	4½	5
Tetouan	9	4-5	1

The main *gare routière* has 13 ticket windows, each one clearly marked by destination.

Taxis

Grands taxis (shared taxis) leave for Casablanca (US\$3) from just outside the intercity bus station. Other *grands taxis* leave for Fès (US\$6.50), Meknès (US\$4.50) and Salé (US\$0.40) from a lot off Ave Hassan II behind the Hôtel Bouregreg.

Train

Rabat Ville train station (☎ 037 736060) is right in the centre of town. From here trains run every 30 minutes between 6am and 10.30pm to Casa-Port train stations (US\$3.40). Second-class services also run daily to Fès (US\$8, 3½ hours, eight daily) via Meknès (US\$6.40, 2½ hours), Tangier (US\$10, 4½ hours, seven daily) and Marrakesh (US\$12, 4½ hours, eight daily).

GETTING AROUND

Rabat's blue *petits taxis* are plentiful, cheap and quick. A ride around the centre of town will cost about US\$1.20.

AROUND RABAT

SALÉ

pop 400,000

A few hundred metres and half a world away, Salé is a walled city and strongly traditional backwater on the far side of the Oued Bou Regreg estuary.

Salé is best seen on a half-day trip from Rabat. The main entrance to the **medina** is Bab Bou Haja, on the southwestern wall, which opens onto Pl Bab Khebaz. The **Grande Mosquée** is 500m further northwest along Rue Ras ash-Shajara; it's closed to non-Muslims, but the

madrasa (admission US\$1.20; ☞ 9am-noon & 2.30-6pm) is open as a museum.

Shaded by trees and unchanged for centuries, the **Souq el-Ghezal** (Wool Market), is an interesting stop. In the nearby **Souq el-Merzouk**, textiles, basketwork and jewellery are sold.

The most atmospheric way to reach Salé is to take one of the small rowboats (US\$0.10 per person) that cross the Oued Bou Regreg from just below the *mellah*. Alternatively, take bus 16 (US\$0.40) and get off after passing under the railway bridge.

In the village of Oulja, 3km southeast of Salé, the **Complexe de Potiers** (Potters' Cooperative; ☞ sunrise-sunset) is a top spot for the souvenir hunter. A huge selection of ceramics is produced and sold here, including tajine dishes of every size and colour.

THE MEDITERRANEAN COAST & THE RIF

Bounded by the red crags of the Rif Mountains and the crashing waves of the Mediterranean, northern Morocco's wildly beautiful coastline conceals attractions as diverse as the cosmopolitan hustle of Tangier, the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, the old colonial capital of Tetouan, and the superbly relaxing town of Chefchaouen. Further inland, Fès is Morocco's most enchanting city.

TANGIER

pop 650,000

More than any other city, Tangier has been Morocco's face to the world for more years than anyone cares to remember. For half the 20th century, it was home to a shotgun marriage between Western powers who controlled the port via dubious international council. Today, Tangier is an ageing libertine propped up languidly at a bar, having seen it all.

The *brigade touristique* (tourist police) has cracked down on Tangier's legendary hustlers, but the city is not altogether hassle free. If you take it head on and learn to handle the hustlers, you'll find it a likable, lively place. The nightlife is vibrant, the population is cosmopolitan and the cultural vibe is infamous.

Orientation

Tangier's small medina climbs up the hill to the northeast of the city, while the Ville Nouvelle

surrounds it to the west, south and southeast. The large central square known as the Grand Socco (officially named Pl du 9 Avril 1947) provides the link between the two.

Information

BMCE (Banque Marocaine du Commerce Extérieur; Blvd Pasteur; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm & 4-7pm Sat & Sun)

Cyber Café Adam (Rue ibn Rochd; per hr US\$1.20; ☎ 9.30am-3.30am)

Délégation Régionale du Tourisme (ONMT; ☎ 039 948050; fax 039 948661; 29 Blvd Pasteur; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 2.30-6.30pm Mon-Fri)

Emergency service (☎ 039 373737; ☎ 24hr)

Main post office (Blvd Mohammed V)

Pharmacy El Yourr (Blvd Mohammed V)

Red Cross Clinic (Clinique du Croissant Rouge; ☎ 039 946976; 6 Rue al-Mansour Dahabi)

Sights & Activities

The **kasbah** sits on the highest point of the city, behind stout walls. Approaching from the medina, you enter through Bab el-Aassa, the southeastern gate, to find the 17th-century **Dar el-Makhzen** (☎ 039 932097; admission US\$1.20; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 3-5.30pm Wed-Mon, closed Fri afternoon), the former sultan's palace and now a worthwhile museum devoted to Moroccan arts. Before leaving, take a stroll around the Andalucian-style **Sultan's Gardens**.

In the southwest corner of the medina, the **Old American Legation Museum** (☎ 039 935317; www.legation.org; 8 Rue d'Amérique; admission free, donations

appreciated; ☎ 10am-1pm & 3-5pm Mon-Fri) is an intriguing relic of the international zone, with a fascinating collection of memorabilia from the international writers and artists who passed through Tangier.

Housed in a former synagogue, the **Musée de la Fondation Lorin** (☎ 039 930306; lorin@wanadoo.net.ma; 44 Rue Touahine; admission free, donations appreciated; ☎ 11am-1pm & 3.30-7.30pm Sun-Fri) is an engaging collection of photographs, posters and prints of Tangier from 1890 to 1960.

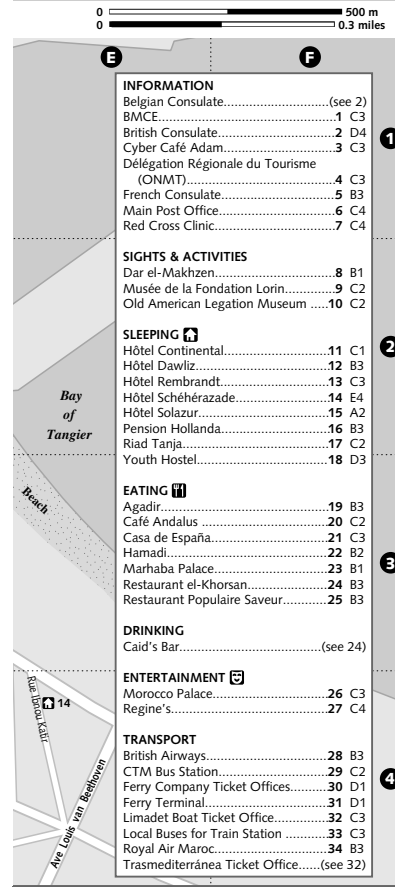
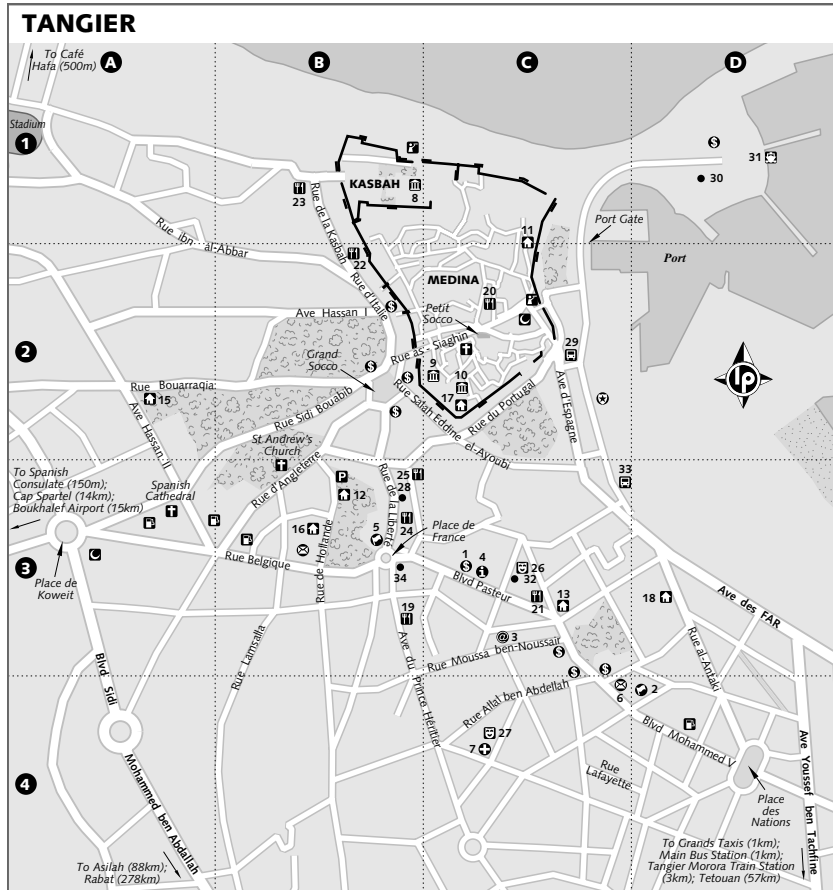
Sleeping BUDGET

Youth Hostel (☎ 039 946127; 8 Rue al-Antaki; dm with/without HI card US\$3.40/4.50, hot showers US\$0.60; ☎ 8-10am, noon-3pm & 6-11pm) Just off Ave d'Espagne and

close to an area with plenty of bars, Tangier's youth hostel is fair value as Moroccan youth hostels go – clean enough but a bit tired.

Pension Hollanda (☎ 039 937838; 139 Rue de Hollande; s/d US\$12/17; ☎) Tucked away in a quiet street a short walk from Pl de France, this friendly *pension* (guesthouse) has sparkling clean whitewashed rooms, all with sinks; doubles come with a shower.

Hôtel Continental (☎ 039 931024; hcontinental@iam.net.ma; 36 Rue Dar el-Baroud; s/d incl breakfast US\$35/45) Something of a Tangerine institution, the Hôtel Continental is the pick of the bunch in the medina. Overlooking the port with a charming eccentricity, rooms are well-sized, with bathrooms and TV. The terrace is great for views and imagining you're a character in a Paul Bowles novel (scenes of *The Sheltering Sky* were filmed here).



MIDRANGE & TOP END

Hôtel Rembrandt (☎ 039 937870; rembrandt@menara.ma; Blvd Mohammed V; s/d US\$48/64; ☎) The Rembrandt is a reliable midrange choice in the heart of the Ville Nouvelle. Rooms are comfortable and modern, with only the plastic 'marble' bathrooms striking an odd note. The green garden café is a tranquil spot to relax.

Hôtel Schéhérazade (☎ 039 940803; fax 039 940801; Ave des FAR; s/d US\$61/70; ☎) Of all the midrange places on this stretch of road, the Schéhérazade probably offers the best sea views. Rooms are plain but comfortable, and come complete with satellite TV and telephone.

Hôtel Solazur (☎ 039 940164; fax 039 945286; Ave des FAR; s/d US\$73/88; ☎) The Solazur offers comfortable if nondescript rooms with all the standard four-star amenities and the lobby has a cool, trompe l'oeil stairwell. Views from the rooms facing the ocean are fantastic.

Hôtel Dawliz (☎ 039 333337; www.ledawliz.com; 42 Rue de Hollande; s/d US\$80/103; ☎) This complex offers four-star comforts and unbeatable views of the medina and the Bay of Tangier – which goes a long way to make up for the unexciting décor. Rooms have the expected facilities (the fridge is a nice touch), while the hotel has several shops, restaurants and an ATM. Prices drop by up to 20% outside high season.

Riad Tanja (☎ 039 333538; Rue du Portugal, Escalier Américain; r US\$90-115; ☎) On the edge of the medina, the Tanja combines modern Spain with traditional riad in a very stylish mix. Rooms are extremely comfortable, and decorated with myriad paintings and prints that speak

MOROCCO

MOROCCO

of Tangier's artistic heritage. Some rooms look over the city while the terrace offers grand views over the straits to Spain.

Eating MEDINA

Café Andalus (7 Rue du Commerce; salad US\$0.60, mains from US\$3) Very much a local's place, the Andalus is a tiny place, dishing out cheap and tasty plates of fish and brochettes and bowls of soup. Definitely not a palace, but none the worse for it.

Hamadi (☎ 039 934514; 2 Rue de la Kasbah; mains US\$4.50-7) A traditionally styled place just outside the medina walls. The surroundings are sumptuous, and live music accompanies your Moroccan meal (the *pastilla* is good).

Marhaba Palace (☎ 039 937927; Rue de la Kasbah; mains from US\$14) This garden house is lovingly decorated in traditional style, and music and folklore shows thrown into the cost of your meal. Set meals follow the classic soup, salad, tajine or couscous plus dessert pattern, all well cooked and presented.

VILLE NOUVELLE

Agadir (☎ 068 827696; 21 Ave du Prince Héritier; mains US\$3.50-4.50, set menu US\$5.50) The interior is thoroughly unassuming, but the check tablecloths, red wine and Gallic crooning in the background give this place a hint of French bistro. Meals are good and hearty, with the free use of fresh herbs raising the succulent tajines to a level above the usual fare.

Casa de España (☎ 039 947359; 11 Rue el-Jebha el-Ouatania; mains from US\$7, lunch set menu US\$7) Buzzing with Spanish expats, local businessmen and the occasional tourist, this joint is as lively as they come. Snappily dressed waiters serve up classic Spanish dishes, with some wonderful specials such as lamb with summer fruits.

Restaurant el-Khorsan (☎ 039 935885; El-Minzah Hotel, 85 Rue de la Liberté; mains around US\$15) One of Tangier's classier restaurants, this place serves well-presented Moroccan classics to the soft playing of live musicians, and often traditional dancing later in the evening. It's not cheap and you should dress smart, but the ambience is worth it.

Restaurant Populaire Saveur (☎ 039 336326; 2 Escalier Waller; set menu US\$17; ☎ Sat-Thu) This attractive and welcoming little fish restaurant down the steps from Rue de la Liberté serves excellent, filling set menus. It's as rustic as you could imagine – quaint decoration and rough-

hewn wooden cutlery. The food is delicious though, with steaming fish soup, and plenty of grilled fish. Dessert is typically sticky *seffa* (sweet couscous), all washed down with the house fruit juice cocktail. Not just a meal, a whole experience.

Drinking & Entertainment

Café Hafa (Ave Mohammed Tazi; ☎ 10am-8pm) With a shady terrace overlooking the straits and where Paul Bowles and the Rolling Stones came to smoke hashish, the indolent air still lingers among the locals who hang out here. Come here to enjoy the view and a game of backgammon.

Caid's Bar (El-Minzah, 85 Rue de la Liberté; wine from US\$2.50; ☎ 10am-midnight) Long the establishment's drinking hole of choice, this bar is a classy relic of the grand day of international Tangier, and photos of the famous and infamous who've preceded you adorn the walls. Women are more than welcome.

Tangier's clubbing scene peaks in the summer when cover charges are typically US\$12, with drinks three times the normal bar price.

Good places include **Regine's** (8 Rue al-Mansour Dahabi; ☎ 11.30pm-3am Mon-Sat), a large club popular with trendy young Tangerines, where DJs spin a bit of everything from rai to Europop to house, and **Morocco Palace** (Rue du Prince Moulay Abdallah; ☎ 9pm-4am Mon-Sat), a purely Moroccan interpretation of the nightclub experience, with traditional décor and mostly Arabic pop.

Getting There & Away BUS

The **CTM bus station** (☎ 039 931172), beside the port gate, offers the following departures:

Destination	Fare (US\$)	Duration (hr)	Daily services
Asilah	1.80	1	4
Casablanca	14	6	4
Chefchaouen	4	3	1
Fès	11	6	4
Marrakesh	20	10	1
Meknès	9	5	3
Rabat	10	4½	4
Tetouan	1.70	1	1

Cheaper bus companies operate from the **main bus station** (gare routière; ☎ 039 946928; Pl Jamia el-Arabiya), about 2km south of the city centre.

TAXI

You can hail *grands taxis* to places outside Tangier from a lot next to the main bus station. The most common destinations are Tetouan (US\$3.40, one hour), Asilah (US\$1.80, 30 minutes) and, for Ceuta, Fnideq (US\$3.40, one hour).

TRAIN

Four trains depart daily from Tangier Ville, the swish new train station 3km southeast of the centre. One morning and one afternoon service go to Casa-Voyageurs in Casablanca (US\$13, 5½ hours); a midday service travels via Meknès (US\$9, four hours) to Fès (US\$11, five hours); and a night service (with couchettes) goes all the way to Marrakesh (1st-/2nd-class US\$31/28, without couchette US\$24/16).

Getting Around

Distinguishable by their ultramarine colour with a yellow stripe down the side, *petits taxis* do standard journey around town for US\$0.80 to US\$1.20; fares are 50% higher at night. From **Boukhalef Airport** (☎ 039 393720), 15km southeast of the city, take a cream-coloured *grand taxi* into the centre (US\$8).

AROUND TANGIER

Just 14km west of Tangier lies the dramatic **Cap Spartel**, the northwestern extremity of Africa's Atlantic Coast. Below Cap Spartel, the lovely beach **Plage Robinson** stretches to the south. Five kilometres along here you reach the **Grottes d'Hercule** (admission US\$1.20), next to Le Mirage hotel. Mythically, these caves were the dwelling place for Hercules when he mightily separated Europe from Africa.

CEUTA (SEBTA)

pop 75,000

Jutting out east into the Mediterranean, this 20-sq-km peninsula has been a Spanish enclave since 1640. Its relaxed, well-kept city centre with bars, cafés and Andalusian atmosphere provides a sharp contrast to the other side of the border. Nonetheless, Ceuta is still recognisably African. Between a quarter and a third of the population are of Rif Berber origin, giving the enclave a fascinating Iberian-African mix.

Orientation & Information

Most of the hotels, restaurants and offices of interest are on the narrow spit of land linking

the peninsula to the mainland. The Plaza de Africa, unmistakable for its giant cathedral, dominates the city centre. The port and ferry terminal are a short walk to the northwest. The border is 2km to the south along the Avenida Martínez Catena.

To phone Ceuta from outside Spain, dial ☎ 0034 before the nine-digit phone number. Also remember that Ceuta is on Spanish time and uses the euro.

Cyber Ceuta (☎ 956 512303; Paseo Colón; per hr US\$3.20; ☎ 11am-2pm & 5-10pm Mon-Sat, 5-11pm Sun)

Main post office (correos y telégrafos; Plaza de España; ☎ 8.30am-8.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-2pm Sat)

Tourist office (☎ 956 501401; www.ceuta.es in Spanish; Avenida Muelle Cañonero Dato; ☎ 9am-3pm Mon-Fri) Very friendly and efficient, with good maps and brochures.

Sights

Ceuta's history is marked by the **Ruta Monumenta**, a series of excellent information boards in English and Spanish outside key buildings and monuments.

The impressive remnants of the **city walls** (☎ 956 511770; Avenida González Tablas; admission free; ☎ 10am-2pm & 5-8pm) and the walled **moat of Foso de San Felipe** remain from the Hispano-Portuguese period in the 16th century.

The most intriguing museum is the **Museo de la Legión** (☎ 606 733566; Paseo de Colón; admission free, donations appreciated; ☎ 10am-1.30pm & 4-6pm Mon-Fri, 4-6pm Sat & Sun), dedicated to the Spanish Legion, an army unit that was set up in 1920 and played a pivotal role in Franco's army at the beginning of the Spanish Civil War.

Sleeping

Pensión La Bohemia (☎ 956 510615; 16 Paseo de Revelín; r US\$38) A charming and spotless little place located above a shopping arcade, with potted plants, shiny tile floors and a surfeit of Marilyn Monroe pictures. The rooms are fresh and clean and there are piping-hot communal showers.

Hostal Central (☎ 956 516716; www.hostalesceuta.com; 15 Paseo de Revelín; s/d US\$51/72; ☎) This good-value two-star hostel has a cosy charm with bright, small but spotless rooms; all come with bathroom and fridge. It's centrally located, and low-season discounts can tip it into the budget bracket.

Ulises Gran Hotel (☎ 956 514540; fax 956 514546; 5 Calle Camoens; s/d incl breakfast US\$67/106; ☎) Falling one short of its four-star aspirations, the Ulises is nevertheless a fine, well-appointed

place to stay. Rooms with balconies have views of the sea, and the recently refurbished lobby gives the whole place a lift.

Parador Hotel La Muralla (☎ 956 514940; ceuta@parador.es; 15 Plaza de Africa; s/d from US\$83/115; 📍) Ceuta's top address is this grand four-star hotel on the main square. It is mostly a 1970s creation, although some rooms occupy converted munitions stores lining the Foso de San Felipe. Rooms are spacious and comfortable.

Eating

In addition to the places listed here, the Pab-lado Marinero (Seamen's Village) beside the yacht harbour is home to a number of reliable if not outstanding restaurants, ranging from Italian to burger places.

La Tasca del Pedro (☎ 956 510473; 3 Avenida Alcalde Sánchez Prados; mains US\$6.50-13; 📍 closed Mon-Sat) Small, friendly and popular with the locals, this restaurant has a good range of seafood, Spanish and simple Italian dishes.

Club Nautico (☎ 956 514440; Calle Edris; set menu from US\$9) This simple fish restaurant has a nice location overlooking the yacht harbour. The three-course *menú del día* (daily set lunch menu) is a popular choice.

La Marina (☎ 956 514007; 1 Alférez Bayton; mains US\$13-15, set menu US\$10; 📍 Mon-Sat) This smart, friendly restaurant is often crowded at lunch time. It specialises in fish dishes, but also does a great value three-course set menu of the chicken/fish and chips variety.

Getting There & Away

Bus 7 runs up to the Moroccan *frontera* (border) every 10 minutes from Plaza de la Constitución (US\$0.80). The large *grand-taxi* lot next to Moroccan border control has departures to Tetouan (US\$3.40, 40 minutes). For Tangier, take a *grand taxi* to Fnideq (US\$0.60, 10 minutes), just south of the border.

The **ferry terminal** (estación marítima; Calle Muelle Cañonero Dato) is west of the town centre and from here there are several daily high-speed ferries to Algeciras (p195).

TETOUAN

pop 320,000

Tetouan is quite unlike anywhere else in the Rif, or even Morocco. For more than 40 years, from 1912 to 1956, it was the capital of the Spanish Protectorate, bequeathing it a unique Hispano-Moorish atmosphere. The neat me-

dina – a Unesco World Heritage site – sits hard against the modern Spanish part of town, with its whitewashed buildings, high shuttered windows and a spectacular backdrop of the Rif Mountains.

Orientation & Information

The Ville Nouvelle is centred on Place Moulay el-Mehdi and the pedestrian stretch of Ave Mohammed V, which runs west to the vast Place Hassan II. Around here you'll find the hotels, banks, most of the restaurants and cafés, and the bus station. The entrance to the medina is off the grand Place Hassan II, flanked on the north side by the Royal Palace. From a compact centre the town sprawls along the hillside and down into the valley.

BMCE Foreign Exchange Office (Pl Moulay el-Mehdi; 📍 10am-2pm & 4-8pm)

Délégation Régionale du Tourisme (ONMT; ☎ 039 961915; fax 039 961914; 30 Ave Mohammed V; 📍 8.30am-noon & 2.30-6.30pm Mon-Thu, 8.30-11am & 3-6.30pm Fri)

Post office (Pl Moulay el-Mehdi)

Remote Studios (☎ 039 711172; 13 Ave Mohammed V; per hr US\$1; 📍 24hr) Internet access.

Sights

The bustling Unesco World Heritage-listed **medina** (which is home to some 40 mosques, of which the **Grande Mosquée** and **Saidi Mosque** are the most impressive) opens through its main gate, Bab er-Rouah, onto Pl Hassan II, Tetouan's grand main square. At the opposite end of the medina, the **Musée Marocain** (Musée Ethnographique; admission US\$1.20; 📍 9.30am-noon & 3.30-6.30pm Mon-Fri) is housed inside the bastion in the town wall.

Opposite Bab el-Oklá, the medina's oldest gate, children learn traditional arts and crafts at the **artisanal school** (☎ 039 972721; admission US\$1.20; 📍 8am-noon & 2.30-5.30pm Mon-Thu & Sat).

Sleeping

Hotel Bilbao (☎ 039 964114; 7 Ave Mohammed V; s/d US\$6/8) Virtually on Pl al-Jala, this reliable cheapie has surprisingly big rooms, many with wrought-iron balconies. That rooms come with showers is also a big selling point. Be on your best behaviour though – feisty chambermaids rule the hotel with a rod of iron.

Hotel Victoria (☎ 039 965015; 23 Ave Mohammed V; s/d/tr US\$6/9/14) Small but nicely formed, the Victoria gives guests a warm welcome. Rooms are simple but comfortable, and the shared

bathrooms scrubbed spotlessly clean. It has just a clutch of rooms, so consider booking ahead at busy times of year.

Hôtel Panorama Vista (☎ 039 964970; fax 039 964969; Rue Moulay Abbas; s/d incl breakfast from US\$27/36; 📍) This three-star hotel is a rare piece of class in the centre of Tetouan that more than lives up to its name. Rooms are immaculate, and the best have dramatic views over the Rif Mountains. The 1st-floor café, Salon de Thé Panorama Vista (below), is popular.

Eating

Snack Youssi (Rue Youseff ben Tachfine; sandwiches from US\$2; 📍 until midnight) Fill up on a sandwich here for lunch and you might not be hungry again until breakfast. Baguettes are stuffed to overflowing with various fillings, topped out with salad and a handful of chips. Great value.

Restaurant Restinga (21 Ave Mohammed V; fish dishes from US\$4.50; 📍 noon-2.30pm & 7-9.30pm) Easily Tetouan's top dining spot is the vine-covered courtyard of this charming restaurant. The abundance of fish and seafood on the menu is a reminder of the town's proximity to the coast. As the only restaurant serving alcohol, it's always busy – something the management takes advantage of by automatically adding a 10% service charge to the bill.

Restaurant Palace Bouhhal (☎ 039 998797; 48 Jamaa Kebir; set menu US\$12; 📍 10am-4pm) The only palace restaurant in Tetouan is popular with Spanish tour groups, so reservations are essential. The palace is suitably sumptuous: plush carpets, gurgling fountains and rose petals. Live folk music accompanies the classically Moroccan four-course meal – soup, salad, brochettes, couscous and tajines.

Salon de Thé Panorama Vista (☎ 039 964970; fax 039 964969; Hôtel Panorama Vista, Ave Moulay Abbas) Tetouan's trendiest café, this hotel café has quite glorious views over the Rif Mountains. Waiters work hard, and you'll need to do the same to grab their attention.

Getting There & Away

All buses depart from the **bus station** (cnr Rue Sidi Mandri & Rue Moulay Abbas). **CTM** (☎ 039 961688) has buses to Tangier (US\$1.70, one hour, one daily); Casablanca (US\$12, six to seven hours, two daily) via Rabat (US\$9, four to five hours); and Chefchaouen (US\$2.30, 1½ hours, three daily). There are daily non-CTM departures to Meknès (US\$7, five hours) and Marrakesh (US\$16, 11 hours).

Grands taxis to Fnideq (for Ceuta; US\$3.20, 30 minutes), Martil (US\$0.50, 15 minutes), Cabo Negro and M'diq (US\$0.60, 20 minutes) leave from Ave Hassan II, southeast of the bus station.

CHEFCHAOUEN

pop 45,000

Set beneath the striking peaks of the Rif Mountains, Chefchaouen has long been charming travellers. One of the prettiest towns in Morocco, its old medina is a delight of Moroccan and Andalucian influence with red-tiled roofs, bright blue buildings, and narrow lanes converging on a delightful square.

Information

Most of the hotels, restaurants and offices of interest are on the narrow spit of land linking the peninsula to the mainland. The Plaza de Africa, unmistakable for its giant cathedral, dominates the city centre. The port and ferry terminal are a short walk to the northwest. The border is 2km to the south along the Avenida Martinez Catena.

Banque Populaire (Plaza Uta el-Hammam; 📍 9.30am-1pm & 3.30-9pm)

Hospital Mohammed V (☎ 039 986228; Ave al-Massira al-Khadra)

Pharmacy Alhambra (Rue Moulay Ali ben Rachid)

Post office (Ave Hassan II)

Saadoune.net (Plaza Uta el-Hammam; per hr US\$1.20; 📍 10am-midnight)

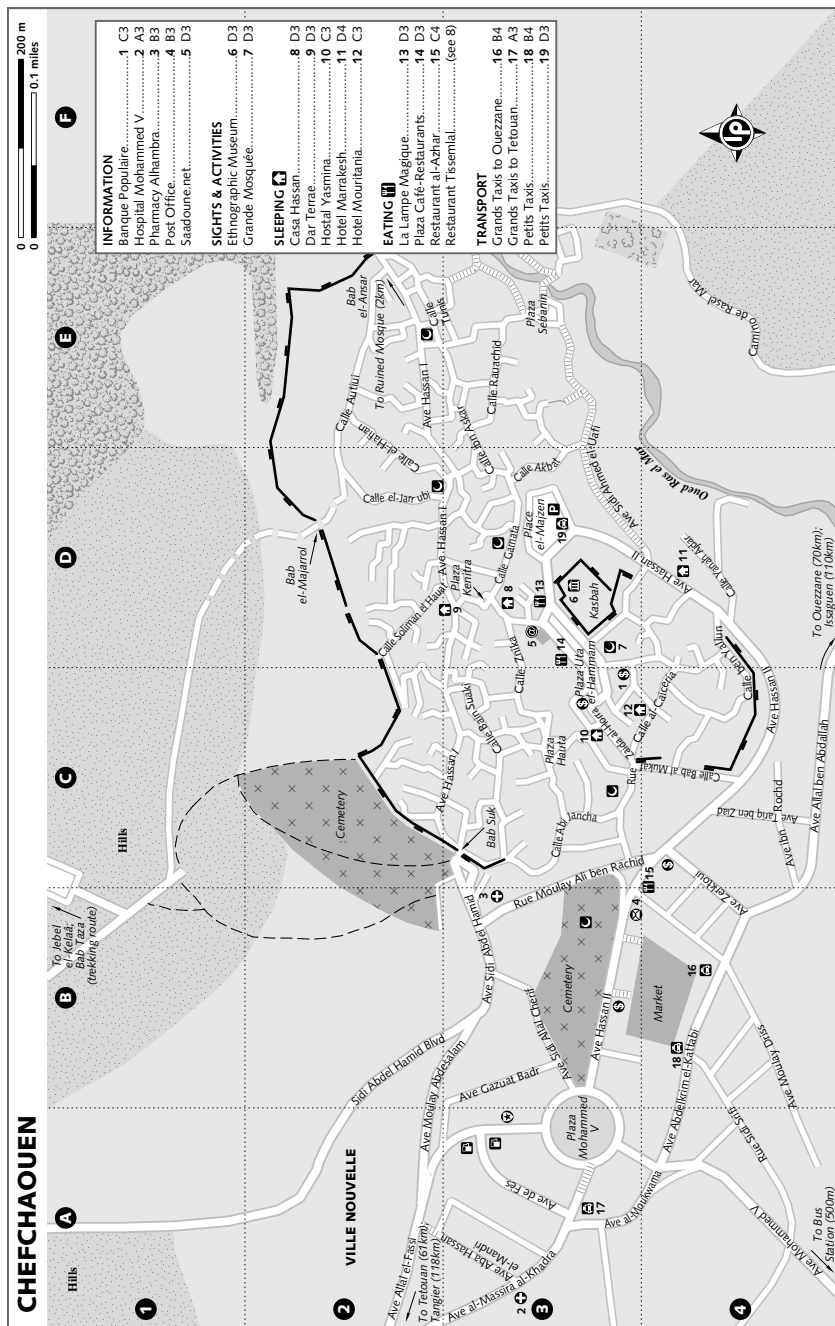
Sights & Activities

Chefchaouen's **medina** is one of the loveliest in Morocco with blinding blue-white hues and an unmistakably Andalucian flavour. The heart of the medina is the shady, cobbled **Plaza Uta el-Hammam**, which is dominated by the red-hued walls of the **kasbah** (☎ 039 986343; admission US\$1.20; 📍 9am-1pm & 3-6.30pm Wed-Mon) and the striking **Grande Mosquée**, which is noteworthy for its unusual octagonal tower. Inside the kasbah's gardens is a modest **ethnographic museum** where the photos of old Chefchaouen are the highlights.

Trekking in the Rif Mountains is another Chefchaouen drawcard, especially **Jebel el-Kelaâ** (1616m) which towers over the town and can be easily climbed in one day.

Sleeping

Hotel Mouritania (☎ 039 986184; 15 Rue Qadi Alami; s/d US\$5/8) For budget value, you'll have to go a



long way to beat the Mouritania. Rooms are simple, but there's the obligatory roof terrace and a comfy courtyard lounge that's ideal for hooking up with other travellers. Staff are helpful, and the breakfasts (US\$1.70) are great too.

Hostal Yasmina (☎ 039 883118; yasmina45@hotmail.com; 12 Rue Zaida al-Horra; r per person US\$7) For the price bracket, this place sparkles. Rooms are bright and clean, and there's lots of hot water in the showers and a great roof terrace.

Hotel Marrakesh (☎ 039 987774; Ave Hassan II; s/d US\$16/28, with shower US\$23/34) Set downhill from the action, the Hotel Marrakesh has soul. Bright blue rooms invite fresh air in and the roof terrace offers fine views over the valley.

Dar Terrae (☎ 039 987598; darterrae@hotmail.com; Ave Hassan I; r incl breakfast US\$28-51) Dar Terrae feels like an escape from the outside world – cheerfully painted rooms are individually decorated with their own bathroom and fireplace, all hidden up and down a tumble of stairs and odd corners. Three terraces add to the hideaway factor. The Italian owners prepare a fantastic breakfast spread every day, and other meals on request.

Casa Hassan (☎ 039 986153; www.casahassan.com; 22 Rue Targui; s/d/tr half board from US\$51/68/85; ☎) A long-established upmarket choice, this guesthouse has more than a hint of the Arabian Nights about it. Rooms are individually decorated with carved wooden doors, beds tucked into coves, colourful tiled bathrooms and locally woven rugs, all stylishly comfortable. The terrace is set for elegant lounging and you'll want to try Restaurant Tissemlal (see right).

Eating

Plaza Café-Restaurants (Plaza Uta el-Hammam; breakfast from US\$1.70, mains from US\$3; ☎ 8am-11pm) One of the most popular eating options in Chefchaouen is to choose one of the dozen or so café-restaurants on the main square. Menus are virtually identical – continental breakfasts, soups and salads, tajines and seafood – but the food is good and they have the best ambience in town.

Restaurant al-Azhar (Ave Moulay Driss; mains from US\$3; ☎ 8am-9pm) Tucked in by the steps down from the post office, this place does a roaring trade, attracting workers and families in equal measure. Tajines and the like are all on offer; a better option is to check out the fish counter out front and order a huge seafood platter (US\$6).

La Lampe Magique (☎ 065 406464; Rue Targui; mains from US\$5, set menu US\$8.50) This magical place overlooking Plaza Uta el-Hammam serves delicious Moroccan staples in a grand setting. Three floors include a laid-back lounge, a more formal dining area, and a rooftop terrace that's open to the stars. Painted blue walls bring Chefchaouen's charm inside, while brick floors and dark wooden tables enhance the local flavour. The food – featuring favourites such as lamb tajine with prunes and some great cooked salads – is delicious.

Restaurant Tissemlal (☎ 039 986153; 22 Rue Targui; set menu US\$7) The restaurant inside the Casa Hassan is another sure bet for a fine meal in enchanting surroundings. Always hospitable, this place is especially welcoming on a chilly evening, when a fire roars and warms the bones. The menu includes the Moroccan standards with a few twists. Don't pass on the fresh goat cheese salad, a local Rif speciality.

Getting There & Away

CTM (☎ 039 988769) has two afternoon buses passing through Chefchaouen en route to Fès (US\$7, four hours) and one afternoon bus to Tangier (US\$4, three hours) via Tetouan (US\$2.30, 1½ hours); reserve your seat at least a day in advance.

Grands taxis heading to Tetouan (US\$3.40, one hour) leave from just below Plaza Mohammed V.

MELILLA

pop 65,000

Melilla is the smaller and less affluent of the two enclaves that mark the last vestiges of Spain's African empire and with a third of its inhabitants being of Rif Berber origin, it has an atmosphere all of its own – neither quite European nor African. The centre of Melilla is a delight of modernist architecture and quiet gardens.

Orientation & Information

The Ville Nouvelle is centred on Place Moulay el-Mehdi and the pedestrian stretch of Ave Mohammed V, which runs west to the vast Place Hassan II. Around here you'll find the hotels, banks, most of the restaurants and cafés and the bus station.

To phone Melilla from outside Spain, dial ☎ 0034 before the nine-digit phone number. Also remember that Melilla is on Spanish time and uses the euro.

KIF IN THE RIF

The smoking of kif (marijuana) is an ancient tradition in northern Morocco (the word stems from the Arabic word for 'pleasure'), and cultivation is widespread in the Rif Mountains; some villages grow nothing else. In fact, one theory claims that the Rif is the source of the Western slang term 'reefer'.

Hashish, which is essentially compressed kif, is a stronger, modern (1960s) invention developed for export. While an old goatherder in the mountains may break out his kif pipe should you stop to chat, hashish is favoured by younger, more Westernised Rifians.

The Rif is one of the most economically deprived areas of Morocco, and kif has become the mainstay of the economy, flourishing with the aid of a blind eye from the authorities. In recent years though, pressure from the US and particularly the EU has led to a less favourable opinion of this illicit activity. International aid programmes have started to target ecological and cultural tourism as sectors of development, although spend any time in the region and you'll quickly realise that much remains to be done to bring the local infrastructure up to scratch and hence many locals remain dependent on kif for their livelihoods.

In 2004, the production of kif was technically made illegal and farmers can now be prosecuted. In practice, only a few prosecutions have occurred, and the discreet possession and use of kif is still largely tolerated. That said, never travel in possession of kif and mistrust all dealers – many double as police informers.

Sights

The main entrance to the fortress of **Melilla la Vieja** (Old Melilla), which perches over the Mediterranean, is **Puerta de la Marina** (Calle General Macías), where you'll find a pair of 15th-century water cisterns, **Aljibes de las Peñuelas** (admission US\$1.60; ☎ 10am-2pm & 5-9.30pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Apr-Sep, 10am-2pm & 4.30-8.30pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Oct-Mar). The terrace of the small **Museo de Arqueología e Historia de Melilla** (☎ 952 681339; Plaza Pedro de Estopiñán; admission free; ☎ 10am-1.30pm & 4-8.30pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) has fantastic views overlooking the city.

The new part of town, west of the fortress, is considered by some to be Spain's 'second modernist city', after Barcelona. The highlight is Plaza de España, with the lovely façade of the **Palacia de la Asamblea**.

Sleeping & Eating

Hostal Residencia Parque (☎ 956 682143; 15 Calle General Marina; s/d US\$26/51) This popular *pen-sion* overlooks Parque Hernandez. Rooms are small, but clean and bright, with TV and bathroom. Advance booking advised.

Hostal Residencia Cazaza (☎ 956 684648; 6 Calle Primo de Rivera; s/d US\$29/45) A decent-value *pen-sion*, the Cazaza has eleven smallish, high-ceilinged rooms, with TVs, bathtubs and balconies. Management is friendly.

Parador de Melilla (☎ 956 684940; Avenida Cándido Lobera; r US\$124; ☎ ☎ ☎) From the outside, Melilla's top hotel looks covered with strange sci-

fi towers. Inside, there are large, grand rooms with shiny fittings and lots of marble. The best have balconies, with great views out to sea.

La Onubense (5 Calle Pareja; tapas from US\$1; ☎ noon-3pm & 7pm-midnight Mon-Sat) With its rough-hewn wood furniture and unpolished décor, this place looks like the quintessential tapas bar. The house speciality is spicy *bollito de Pringá* (meatball) and other classic tapas delicacies.

La Cervecería (Calle de General O'Donnell; tapas from US\$1.30; ☎ 12.30-4pm & 8.30pm-midnight) Classier than the Onubense across the street, La Cervecería is decorated in Gaudiesque fashion by the Melillan architect Carlos Baeza.

Café Central (Plaza de España; breakfast from US\$2.60, sandwiches from US\$2; ☎ 7am-1pm & 4-10pm) Next to the park, this is a busy breakfast spot, with great coffee, pastries and cooked items. The inside can sometimes be a bit smoky, but there's a seating area outside.

Getting There & Away

To get to the border, you'll need to catch the local bus 2 (marked 'Aforos'), which runs between Plaza de España and the Beni Enzar border post (US\$0.80) every 30 minutes from 7.30am to 11pm.

Ferry and hydrofoil services are operated by **Trasmediterránea** (☎ 956 690902; www.trasmediterranea.es; Plaza de España; ☎ 9am-1pm & 5-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat). Tickets are also available at the **ferry terminal** (estación marítima; ☎ 956 681633). There are daily ferries to Malaga and Almería.

FÈS

pop 1 million

The medina of Fès el-Bali (Old Fès) is the largest living medieval Islamic city in the world. Nothing quite prepares you for your first visit, which can truly be an assault on the senses. Its narrow winding alleys and covered bazaars are crammed with shops, restaurants, workshops, mosques, *madrassas* and extensive dye pits and tanneries – a riot of sights, sounds and smells.

Orientation

Fès can be neatly divided into three distinct parts: Fès el-Bali (the core of the medina; the main entrance is Bab Bou Jeloud) in the east; Fès el-Jdid (containing the *mellah* and Royal Palace) in the centre; and the Ville Nouvelle, the administrative area constructed by the French, to the southwest. Frequent local buses connect the Ville Nouvelle with the medina, a 10-minute journey (US\$0.40).

Information

INTERNET ACCESS

London Cyber (Map p162; Ave de la Liberté; per hr US\$1.20; ☎ 10am-10pm)

Teleboutique Cyber Club (Map p164; Blvd Mohammed V; per hr US\$0.80; ☎ 9am-11pm)

MEDICAL SERVICES

Hôpital Ghassani (Map p162; ☎ 055 622777) Located east of the Ville Nouvelle in Dhar Mehraz.

Night Pharmacy (Map p164; ☎ 055 623493; Blvd Moulay Youssef; ☎ 9pm-6am) Located in the north of the Ville Nouvelle; staffed by a doctor and pharmacist.

MONEY

Société Générale (Map p162; Ave des Français; ☎ 8.45am-noon & 2.45-6pm Mon-Thu, 8.45-11am Fri, 8.45am-noon Sat) Immediately outside Bab Bou Jeloud.

POST

Main post office (Map p164; cnr Ave Hassan II & Blvd Mohammed V)

Post office (Map p162; Pl de l'Istiqlal) In the medina.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Office National Marocain du Tourisme (ONMT; Map p164; ☎ 055 623460; fax 055 654370; Pl de la Résistance; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 2.30-6.30pm Mon-Thu, 8.30-11.30am & 3-6.30pm Fri)

Dangers & Annoyances

Fès has long been notorious for its *faux guides* (false guides). The situation has improved

with the introduction of a *brigade touristique*; still, high unemployment forces many to persist. A few hustlers hang about Fès train station and hotels, but the worst place is around Bab Bou Jeloud, the main western entrance to the medina.

Sights

FÈS EL-BALI (OLD FÈS)

Within the old walls of Fès el-Bali lies an incredible maze of twisting alleys, blind turns and hidden *souqs*. Navigation can be confusing and getting lost at some stage a certainty, but this is part of the medina's charm: you never quite know what discovery lies around the next corner.

If Fès is the spiritual capital of Morocco, the **Kairaouine Mosque** (Map p162) is its true heart. Built in 859 by refugees from Tunisia, and rebuilt in the 12th century, it can accommodate up to 20,000 people at prayer. Non-Muslims are forbidden to enter and will have to suffice with glimpses of its seemingly endless columns from the gates on Talaa Kebira and Pl as-Seffarine.

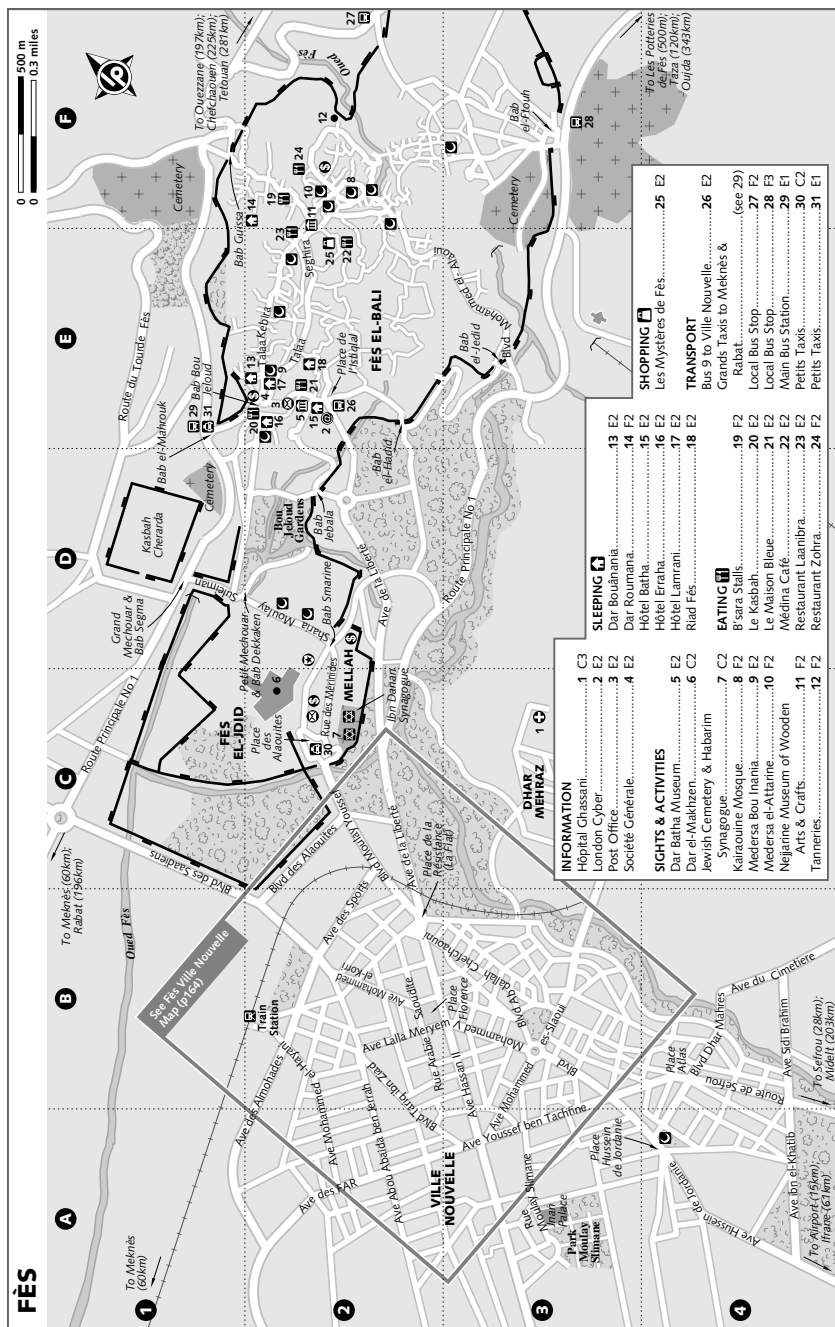
Located 150m east of Bab Bou Jeloud, the 14th-century **Medersa Bou Inania** (Map p162; admission US\$1.20; ☎ 8am-5pm) is said to be the finest of Fès' theological colleges constructed by the Merenids. The *zellij*, *muqarna* (plasterwork) and wood carving are amazingly elaborate, and views from the roof are also impressive.

Founded by Abu Said in 1325 in the heart of the medina, the **Medersa el-Attarine** (Map p162; admission US\$1.20; ☎ 8.30am-1pm & 2.30-5pm) displays the traditional patterns of Merenid artisan-ship. The *zellij* base, stucco work and cedar wood at the top of the walls and the ceiling is every bit as elegant as the artistry of the Medersa Bou Inania.

The **Nejarine Museum of Wooden Arts & Crafts** (Map p162; ☎ 035 740580; Pl an-Nejarine; admission US\$2.30; ☎ 10am-5pm) is a wonderfully restored *funduq* (a caravanserai for travelling merchants). Photography is forbidden.

In a century-old Hispano-Moorish palace, the **Dar Batha Museum** (Museum of Moroccan Arts & Crafts; Map p162; ☎ 035 634116; Pl de l'Istiqlal; admission US\$1.20; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 2.30-6pm Wed-Mon) houses an excellent collection of traditional Moroccan arts and crafts.

The **tanneries** (Map p162) of Fès are one the city's most iconic sights (and smells). Head northeast of Pl as-Seffarine and take the left fork after about 50m; you'll soon pick up



the unmistakable waft of skin and dye that will guide you into the heart of the leather district.

FÈS EL-JDID (NEW FÈS)

The entrance to **Dar el-Makhzen** (Royal Palace; Map p162; Pl des Alaouites) is a stunning example of modern restoration, but the 80 hectares of palace grounds are not open to the public.

During the 14th century, Fès el-Jdid became a refuge for Jews, thus creating a **mellah**. The *mellah's* southwest corner is home to the fascinating **Jewish Cemetery & Habarim Synagogue** (Map p162; admission free, donations appreciated; 7am-7pm).

Festivals & Events

Every June the **Fès Festival of World Sacred Music** (055 740535; www.fesfestival.com) brings together music groups and artists from all corners of the globe. It's become an established favourite on the 'world music' festival circuit.

Sleeping MEDINA

Hôtel Erraha (Map p162; 035 633226; Pl Bou Jeloud; s/d US\$6/9, hot showers US\$1.20) Just outside Bab Bou Jeloud, this cheapie has large airy rooms and a roof terrace. Murals give the place a bit of a lift. As with many places in this bracket, the shared bathroom facilities reflect the price tag.

Hôtel Lamrani (Map p162; 035 634411; Talaa Seghira; r US\$17-23) Another place with a great location, just away from the hustle of Bab Bou Jeloud. Rooms are of a good size and bathrooms are clean with hot showers. If only the management weren't so grumpy, this would be fantastic.

Dar Bouanania (Map p162; 035 637282; 21 Derb el Salem; s with/without shower US\$28/23, d with/without shower US\$34/28) Fès has long lacked any riad-style budget accommodation, so this new hotel makes a welcome appearance on the scene. Well signed off Talaa Kebira, it's very much a traditional Moroccan house, with a lovely *zellij* and stucco courtyard, a series of nicely decorated bedrooms over several floors and a small roof terrace.

Hôtel Batha (Map p162; 035 741077; fax 035 741078; Pl Batha; s/d incl breakfast US\$37/51; P) Great value on the edge of the medina, this old favourite is a mix of the reasonably modern with the traditionally decorated. Rooms come with sunken bathtubs, although hot water can be

erratic. The whitewashed courtyard is a wonderful, cool refuge from the city heat – as is the pool.

Dar Roumana (Map p162; 035 741637; www.darroumana.com; 30 Derb el Amer, Zkak Roumane; r US\$79-136; P) Many riads claim to have the best views of Fès' medina, but this beautiful house might just take the prize. There are just five rooms, all immaculate and subtly decorated to show off the painstaking restoration process that brought the building back to life, plus some modern touches such as wi-fi throughout. The roof terrace is a gorgeous place for breakfast or a drink over dinner – you may even get to lend a hand in the kitchen as the owner (a Cordon Bleu chef) offers Moroccan cookery lessons.

Riad Fès (Map p162; 035 741012; www.riadfes.com; 5 Derb ibn Slimane; r/stc incl breakfast from US\$203/339; P) The labyrinthine Riad Fès blends the ancient and modern with impressive panache. The older section features the best of traditional décor, while the newer quarters would not look out of place in a Parisian boutique hotel yet remain unmistakably Moroccan.

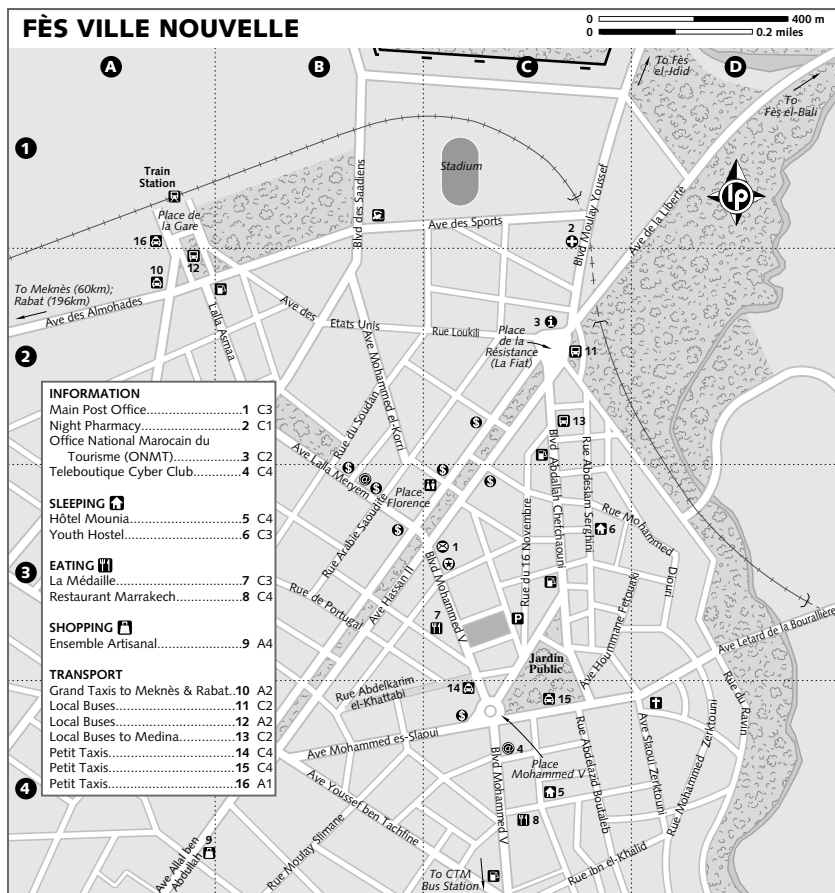
VILLE NOUVELLE

Youth Hostel (Map p164; 035 624085; 18 Rue Abdeslam Serghini; dm US\$5; 8-10am, noon-3pm & 6-10pm) Easily one of the better youth hostels in Morocco, the Fès branch is well looked after and right in the centre of the Ville Nouvelle. Tidy rooms and facilities (including Western-style toilets) are super clean. If you're not a Hostelling International member, there's a US\$0.60 surcharge. Cold showers mean that you should look to *hammams* (traditional bathhouse) for your ablutions.

Hôtel Mounia (Map p164; 035 624838; www.hotelmouniafes.ma in French; 60 Blvd Zerktouni; s/d incl breakfast from US\$48/61; P) A *zellij*-tiled lobby guides you into the modern and classy Hotel Mounia. Rooms are bright and tidy, and all have satellite TV. The onsite restaurant is good, and there's a smokier bar with plenty of water pipes. Staff are exceedingly helpful. It's popular with tour groups and good discounts are often available.

Eating MEDINA

B'sara Stalls (Map p162; soup US\$0.40) You shouldn't leave town without sampling this Fassi speciality. A butterbean and garlic soup, *b'sara*



is served out of hole-in-the-wall places throughout the medina – our favourites are in the Acherbine area. Look for the big cauldrons facing the street, and a guy serving great ladlefuls into rough pottery bowls. Delicious with an extra dash of olive oil and a hunk of bread, *b'sara* is perfect fuel for exploring the city.

Le Kasbah (Map p162; Rue Serrajine; mains US\$4.50, set menu US\$8) On several floors opposite the cheap hotels at Bab Bou Jeloud, this restaurant occupies a prime spot – the top floor looks out over the medina. The food is good standard Moroccan fare; the four-course menu is particularly good value.

Restaurant Zohra (Map p162; ☎ 055 637699; 3 Derb Ain Nass Bliida; set menu US\$8-10) Tucked away

in the backstreets north of the Kairaouine Mosque, this simple little place is well regarded for its home cooking and warm family welcome.

Médina Café (Map p162; ☎ 035 633430; 6 Derb Mernissi; menus US\$8-13; ☎ 8am-10pm) Just outside Bab Bou Jeloud, this small restaurant is an oasis of serenity, decorated in a traditional yet restrained manner, with a fine attention to details. During the day it's a good place to visit for a quick bite or a fruit juice, in the evening the best of Moroccan fare is on offer – the lamb tajine with dried figs and apricots is a real winner, while the plates of couscous are big enough for two.

Restaurant Laanibra (Map p162; ☎ 035 741009; 61 Ain Lkhail; set menu US\$14-45) This is a sumptuously

THE LIFE OF A FAUX GUIDE

Anas is 17. He is the oldest of his three brothers and sisters. Until he was 13 he did well at school and hoped to go to university one day. Anas' world turned upside down when his father died unexpectedly and he was thrust into being the head of his household. To support his mother and family, he dropped out of school and tried to find work with the tourists visiting Fès' medina.

Like many others before him, Anas hung around Bab Bou Jeloud trying to find tourists he could guide to carpet and handicrafts shop, in hope of a little commission, picking up some of the patter of the official guides, and pointing out the names of streets and fountains along the way. On a good day he could earn Dh100 (US\$12) or so, but the police were a constant worry. He never spent a night in jail (unlike several of his *faux guide* friends), but had his knuckles rapped plenty of times – and his day's earnings confiscated.

When the tourist numbers died down in the winter, Anas tried a brief stint working at the tanneries, but it was a tough job for a small boy, carrying heavy wet skins for less than Dh40 (US\$4.50) a day. He left after a few months, worrying that the chemicals in the dye pits were affecting his health.

Anas has now moved to Chefchaouen, where he touts for a handicrafts shop and has a casual line in selling kif to backpackers. The money isn't as good as in Fès, but he says it's worth it to no longer get hassled by the police. He'd eventually like to finish school, but earning to help support his family will remain his number one priority for the foreseeable future.

decorated 14th-century palace, with all the craftsmanship you'd expect to find in a riad, with side alcoves forming a series of private dining areas. The menu shows equal care and attention – the rich *pastilla* is a favourite, but difficult to finish if you've loaded up on starters (vegetarians will love the cooked salads). This place is open for lunch year-round, but for dinner only in summer.

La Maison Bleue (Map p162; ☎ 035 636052; 2 Pl de l'Istiqlal; set menu incl drinks guests/honguests US\$57/62; ☎ dinner) Reservations are necessary at this elegant riad restaurant. The setting is intimate and romantic, with diners serenaded by an oud player (replaced by livelier Gnaoua song and dance later in the evening). Set menus run along traditional lines – salads, tajines and the like – but the preparation and presentation are a definite cut above most other places. Alcohol is served.

VILLE NOUVELLE

Restaurant Marrakech (Map p164; ☎ 035 930876; 11 Rue Omar el-Mokhtar; mains from US\$6) This restaurant's recent makeover has added hugely to its charm – red plastered walls and dark furniture, with a cushion-strewn salon at the back. But the menu's variety continues to be its strength, offering delights such as chicken tajine with apples and olives, or lamb with aubergines (eggplants) and peppers. Delicious food in lovely surroundings.

La Médaille (Map p164; ☎ 055 620183; 24 Rue Laarbi al-Kaghat; mains US\$8-10, set menu US\$12-17; ☎ closed Sun dinner) This French-Moroccan place is unique for the Sephardic influence featured on the menu. Take the opportunity to try the *sauccisse merguez* (lamb sausage) or *sauccisse de foie* (liver sausage) – you won't find them anywhere else. Seats at the front of house are preferable, as the rear is a smoky bar that's more canteen than restaurant (alcohol is served, naturally).

Shopping

Fès is and always has been the artisanal capital of Morocco. The choice of crafts is wide, quality is high, and prices are competitive. As usual, it's best to seek out the little shops off the main tourist routes.

Ensemble Artisanal (Map p164; Ave Allah ben Abdallah; ☎ 9am-noon & 2.30-6.30pm) Slightly out of the way in the Ville Nouvelle, the state-run Ensemble Artisanal is always a decent place to get a feel for quality and price.

Les Potteries de Fès (Bab el-Ftouh) An attraction in itself, this is the home of the famous Fassi pottery. You can see the entire production process, from pot throwing to the painstaking hand painting and laying out of *zellij* – it's a joy to behold.

Les Mystères de Fès (53 Derb bin Lemssari) This place is stuffed to the rafters with jewellery, furniture, pots and trinkets.

Getting There & Away

BUS

The main station for **CTM buses** (☎ 035 732992) is near Pl Atlas in the southern Ville Nouvelle. CTM runs the following services:

Destination	Fare (US\$)	Duration (hr)	Daily services
Casablanca	10	5	7
Chefchaouen	7.50	4	3
Marrakesh	17	9	2
Meknès	2	1	6
Rabat	7	3½	7
Tangier	9	6	3
Tetouan	9	5	2

Non-CTM buses depart from the **main bus station** (Map p162; ☎ 035 636032) outside Bab el-Mahrouk.

TAXI

There are several *grand-taxi* ranks dotted around town. Taxis for Meknès (US\$1.60) and Rabat (US\$6.30) leave from in front of the main bus station (outside Bab el-Mahrouk) and from near the train station.

TRAIN

The **train station** (☎ 035 930333) is located in the Ville Nouvelle, a 10-minute walk northwest of Pl Florence. Trains depart every two hours between 7am and 5pm to Casablanca (US\$11, 4½ hours), via Rabat (US\$8, 3½ hours) and Meknès (US\$2, one hour), plus there are two overnight trains. Five trains go to Marrakesh (US\$20, eight hours) and one goes to Tangier (US\$11, five hours).

Getting Around

There's a regular bus service (No 16) between the airport and the train station (US\$0.40, 25 minutes), with departures every half-hour or so. *Grands taxis* have a set fare of US\$14.

Drivers of the red *petits taxis* generally use their meters without any fuss. Expect to pay about US\$1.20 from the train or CTM station to Bab Bou Jeloud.

MEKNÈS

pop 680,000

Morocco's third imperial city is often overlooked by tourist itineraries, but Meknès is worth getting to know. Quieter and smaller than its neighbour, it's also more laid-back

and less hassle but still awash with the winding narrow medina streets and grand buildings befitting a one-time capital of the sultanate.

Orientation

The valley of the (usually dry) Oued Bou Fekrane neatly divides the old medina in the west and the French-built Ville Nouvelle in the east. Ave Moulay Ismail connects them, then becomes the principal route of the Ville Nouvelle, where its name changes to Ave Hassan II.

Moulay Ismail's tomb and imperial city are south of the medina. Train and CTM bus stations are in the Ville Nouvelle, as are most offices and banks, as well as the more expensive hotels. It's a 20-minute walk from the medina to the Ville Nouvelle, but regular (and crowded) local buses and urban *grands taxis* shuttle between the two.

Information

BMCE (Banque Marocaine du Commerce Extérieur; 98 Ave des FAR; ☎ 10am-1pm & 4-7pm)

Cyber de Paris (Zankat Accra; per hr US\$0.90; ☎ 9-2am)

Délégation Régionale du Tourisme (ONMT; ☎ 055 524426; Pl de l'Istiqlal; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 2.30-6.30pm Mon-Thu, 8-11.30am & 3-6.30pm Fri)

Hôpital Moulay Ismail (☎ 035 522805) Off Ave des FAR.

Main post office (Pl de l'Istiqlal)

Night Pharmacy (Rue de Paris)

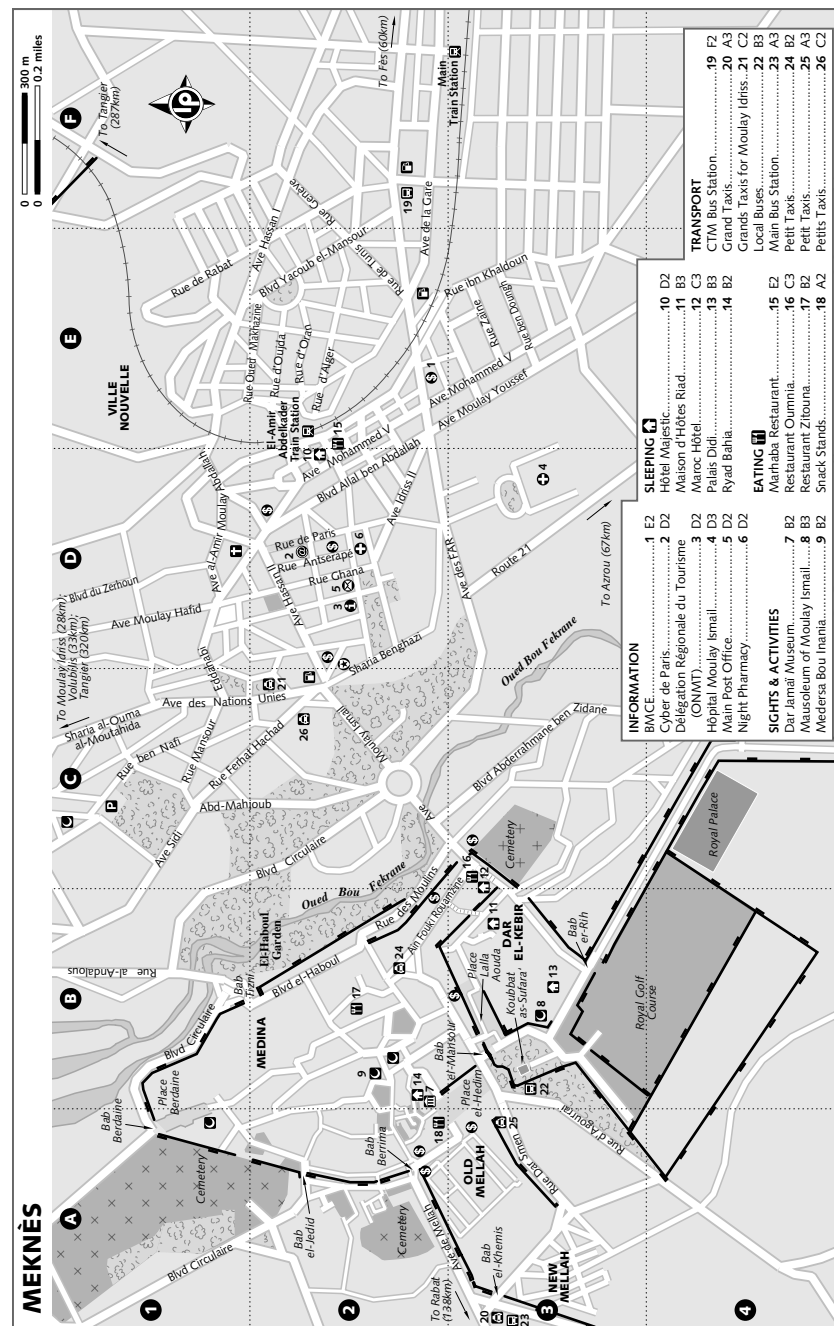
Sights

The heart of Meknès' medina lies to the north of the main square, Pl el-Hedim, with the *mel-lah* to the west. To the south, Moulay Ismail's **imperial city** opens up through one of the most impressive monumental gateways in all of Morocco, **Bab el-Mansour**. Following the road around to the right, you'll come across the grand **Mausoleum of Moulay Ismail** (admission free, donations appreciated; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 2-6pm Sat-Thu), named for the sultan who made Meknès his capital in the 17th century.

Overlooking Pl el-Hedim on the north is the 1882 palace that houses the **Dar Jamaï museum** (☎ 055 530863; Pl el-Hedim; admission US\$1.20; ☎ 9am-noon & 3-6.30pm Wed-Mon). Deeper in the medina, opposite the Grand Mosque, the **Medersa Bou Inania** (Rue Najjarine; admission US\$1.20; ☎ 9am-noon & 3-6pm) is typical of the exquisite interior design that distinguishes Merenid monuments.

Sleeping

Maroc Hôtel (☎ 035 530075; 7 Rue Rouazine; s/d US\$7/14) Despite its inauspicious exterior,



Maroc Hôtel is a budget gem. Friendly and quiet, rooms (with sinks) are freshly painted, and the shared bathrooms are clean. The great terrace and orange-tree-filled courtyard add to the ambience.

Hôtel Majestic (☎ 035 522035; 19 Ave Mohammed V; s with/without bathroom US\$24/15, d with/without bathroom US\$27/20) Built in the 1930s, this grand old lady carries her age well. There's a good mix of rooms (all have sinks) and there's plenty of character to go around, plus a peaceful patio and panoramic roof terrace. Management are helpful and breakfast is included in the price.

Maison d'Hôtes Riad (☎ 035 530542; www.riadmeknes.com; 79 Ksar Chaacha; r incl breakfast US\$57-90; 📍 📍 📍) Meknès' first riad is located amid the ruins of the Palais Ksar Chaacha, the 17th-century imperial residence of Moulay Ismail. There are just six rooms, each individually and tastefully decorated in traditional style. There's an excellent restaurant on the ground floor and a small plunge pool.

Ryad Bahia (☎ 035 554541; www.riad-bahia.com; Derb Sekkaya, Tiberbarine; r incl breakfast US\$57-90; 📍 📍 📍) This charming little riad is just a stone's throw from Pl el-Hedim. The alley entrance opens onto a courtyard (which also hosts a great restaurant), with stairs leading off in all directions to quaint, pretty rooms that have been carefully restored and decorated with fine attention to detail, from the bathroom fittings to the plush rugs.

Palais Didi (☎ 035 558590; www.palaisdidi.com; 7 Dar el-Kbira; r/ste incl breakfast US\$136/170; 📍 📍 📍) Didi is the fancy older sister to the other riads in Meknès' medina, and easily the largest. Five sumptuous suites and five romantic rooms, all different and decked out with antique furniture in the luxurious rooms and deep bathtubs in the *zellij* bathrooms, are set around a sleek marble-tiled courtyard.

Eating

Snack stands (Pl el-Hedim; sandwiches around US\$2; 🕒 7am-10pm) This cluster of snack stands on the northwest corner of Pl el-Hedim is ideal for a lunchtime snack, which can easily stretch into an afternoon of people-watching on the square. There's a wide range of grilled meat fillings, all topped out with generous handfuls of salad.

Marhaba Restaurant (23 Ave Mohammed V; tajines US\$3; 🕒 noon-9pm) 'Never beaten on price' should be this place's proud motto. More a

canteen than restaurant, it packs in everyone from lunchtime workers to gangs of school-girls. Food is cheap and tasty – a bowl of *harira* and a plateful of *makoda* (fried potato patties) will fill you up and still give change from US\$1.20. Superb.

Restaurant Oumnia (☎ 035 533938; 8 Ain Fouki Rouazine; set menu US\$7.50; 🕒 7am-10pm) This informal restaurant is inside a family home, just off the main drag of the Meknès medina, giving diners a warm welcome. There's just a three-course set menu, but it's a real winner, with delicious *harira*, salads and a choice of several tajines of the day.

Restaurant Zitouna (☎ 055 530281; 44 Djemma Zitouna; set menu from US\$13) In the heart of the medina, this grand establishment offers the same palace-restaurant style you'd find in Fès. Its ornate covered courtyard is done up with *zellij* and stucco, with several small salons for more restrained dining. Traditional Moroccan dishes are naturally the order of the day, with *pastilla* being something of a house speciality.

Getting There & Away

The **CTM bus station** (☎ 035 522585; Ave des FAR) is about 300m east of the junction with Ave Mohammed V. The main bus station lies just outside Bab el-Khemis, west of the medina. CTM departures include the following: Casablanca (US\$8, four hours, six daily) via Rabat (US\$5, 2½ hours, six daily), Marrakesh (US\$15, eight hours, daily) and Tangier (US\$9, five hours, three daily).

The principal *grand-taxi* rank is a dirt lot next to the bus station at Bab el-Khemis. There are regular departures to Fès (US\$2, one hour) and Rabat (US\$4.50, 90 minutes). *Grands taxis* for Moulay Idriss (US\$1.20, 20 minutes) leave from opposite the Institut Français – this is also the place to organise round trips to Volubilis.

AROUND MEKNÈS

In the midst of a fertile plain about 33km north of Meknès, **Volubilis** (Ouaillil; admission US\$2.30, parking US\$0.60, guided tour US\$14; 🕒 8am-sunset) are the largest and best-preserved Roman ruins in Morocco. One of the country's most important pilgrimage sites, **Moulay Idriss**, is only about 4.5km from Volubilis. The simplest and quickest way to get here from Meknès is to hire a *grand taxi* for the return trip. A half-day outing will cost around US\$34.

THE ATLANTIC COAST

Miles of glorious sands peppered with small fishing villages, historic ports and fortified towns weave along Morocco's blustery Atlantic Coast. It's a region that sweeps from pristine beachfront to urban sprawl around Casablanca, from the long, windswept beaches in the south to mountain valleys, green as green.

ASILAH

pop 29,500

The bijou resort town of Asilah has become a firm favourite on the traveller's trail of the North Atlantic Coast. It's an intimate, sophisticated introduction to Morocco, with galleries lining the narrow streets. Given its increasing popularity, consider visiting out of season to appreciate the old-world charm of this lovely whitewashed town at its best.

Sights & Activities

Asilah's **medina**, surrounded by sturdy stone fortifications built by the Portuguese in the 15th century, has been largely restored (and sanitised) in recent years. The narrow streets lined by whitewashed houses are well worth a wander amid the ornate wrought-iron window guards and colourful murals. The southwestern bastion of the ramparts is the best for views over the ocean.

Paradise Beach, Asilah's best beach, is 3km south of town and is a gorgeous, pristine spot that really does live up to its name.

Sleeping & Eating

Hôtel Sahara (☎ 039 417185; 9 Rue Tarfaya; s/d US\$11/14, hot showers US\$0.60) By far Asilah's best budget option, this small, immaculately kept hotel offers simple rooms arranged around an open courtyard. Patterned tiles and potted plants adorn the lovely entrance and the compact rooms, though fairly Spartan, are comfortable and well maintained. The shared toilets and showers sparkle.

Hôtel Azayla (☎ 039 416717; e-elhaddad@menara.ma; 20 Rue ibn Rouchd; s/d from US\$34/39) Big, bright, comfy and well-equipped, the rooms here are a really good deal. The bathrooms are new, the décor is tasteful and the giant windows bathe the rooms in light. Prices drop by up to 20% out of high season.

Hôtel Patio de la Luna (☎ 039 416074; 12 Pl Zellaka; s/d US\$34/53) The only accommodation option

in Asilah with any local character, this intimate Spanish-run place is secluded behind an unassuming door on the main drag. The simple, rustic rooms have wooden furniture, woven blankets and tiled bathrooms, and are set around a lovely leafy patio.

Restaurant Yali (☎ 071 043277; Ave Hassan II; mains US\$3-6) Although there's little to choose between them, this is one of the most popular of the string of restaurants along the medina walls. It serves up a good selection of fish, seafood and traditional Moroccan staples.

Restaurant de la Place (☎ 039 417326; 7 Ave Moulay Hassan ben el-Mehdi; mains US\$4.50-9) Friendly, less formal and more varied than its neighbours, this restaurant offers a choice of traditional Moroccan dishes as well as the ubiquitous seafood. For the best of both worlds try the delicious fish tajine.

Casa García (☎ 039 417465; 51 Ave Moulay Hassan ben el-Mehdi; mains US\$9) Spanish-style fish dishes are the speciality at this small restaurant opposite the beach. Go for succulent grilled fish fresh from the port or, more adventurously, octopus, eels, shrimp and barnacles.

Getting There & Away

The tiny bus station is on Ave de la Liberté, where CTM has a ticket office. The train station is 2km north of Asilah. CTM has services to Casablanca (US\$8, 4½ hours) via Rabat (US\$7, 3½ hours), Fès (US\$7, 4½ hours) via Meknès (US\$6, 3½ hours), Tangier (US\$1.20, one hour) and Marrakesh (US\$2.30, nine hours). Cheaper non-CTM buses to Tangier and Casablanca leave roughly every half hour.

Three trains run daily to Rabat (US\$9, 3½ hours) and Casablanca (US\$11, 4½ hours), one to Meknès (US\$6.30, three hours) and Fès (US\$9, four hours) and six daily to Tangier (US\$1.60, 45 minutes). One overnight train goes directly to Marrakesh (US\$20, nine hours).

CASABLANCA

pop 3.8 million

Casa, as Casablanca is popularly known, is a city of incredible contrasts, offering a unique insight into modern Morocco. This sprawling, European-style city is home to racing traffic, simmering social problems, wide boulevards, public parks and imposing Hispano-Moorish and Art Deco buildings that line the streets, their rundown façades in sharp contrast to Casablanca's modernist landmark,

the enormous and incredibly ornate Hassan II mosque.

Orientation

The medina – the oldest part of town – is relatively small and sits in the north of the city close to the port. To the south of the medina is Pl des Nations Unies, a large traffic junction that marks the heart of the city. The CTM bus station and Casa-Port train station are in the centre of the city. Casa-Voyageurs train station is 2km east of the centre and the airport is 30km southeast of town.

Information

EMERGENCY

Service d'Aide Médicale Urgente (SAMU; ☎ 022 252525) Private ambulance service.

SOS Médecins (☎ 022 444444; house call US\$35; ☎ 24hr) Private doctors who make house calls.

INTERNET ACCESS

Fairnet (☎ 022 482631; 25 Rue Zair Mers Sultan; per hr US\$0.90; ☎ 8am–11pm)

Gig@net (☎ 022 484810; 140 Blvd Mohammed Zerkouni; per hr US\$1.20; ☎ 24hr)

MONEY

BMCE (Banque Marocaine du Commerce Extérieur; Hyatt Regency Hotel; ☎ 9am–9pm)

Crédit du Maroc (☎ 022 477255; 48 Blvd Mohammed V)

POST

Central Market post office (cnr Blvd Mohammed V & Rue Chaouia)

Main post office (cnr Blvd de Paris & Ave Hassan II)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Office National Marocain du Tourisme (ONMT; ☎ 022 271177; 55 Rue Omar Slaoui; ☎ 8.30am–4.30pm Mon–Fri)

Syndicat d'Initiative (☎ 022 221524; 98 Blvd Mohammed V; ☎ 8.30am–4.30pm Mon–Sat, 9am–12.30pm Sun)

Sights

Rising above the Atlantic northwest of the medina, **Hassan II Mosque** is the world's third-largest mosque, built to commemorate the former king's 60th birthday. The mosque rises above the ocean on a rocky outcrop reclaimed from the sea. It's a vast building that holds 25,000 worshippers and can accommodate a further 80,000 in the courtyards and squares around it. To see the interior of the mosque you must take a **guided tour** (☎ 022

482886; adult/student/child US\$14/7/3.40; ☎ 9am, 10am, 11am & 2pm Sat–Thu).

Set in a beautiful villa surrounded by lush gardens, the **Jewish Museum of Casablanca** (☎ 022 994940; 81 Rue Chasseur Jules Gros, Oasis; admission US\$2.30, with guide US\$3.40; ☎ 10am–5pm Mon–Fri) is the only Jewish museum in the Islamic world.

In the trendy suburb of Ain Diab, the beachside **Blvd de la Corniche** is lined with beach clubs, four-star hotels, upmarket restaurants, bars, coffee shops, nightclubs and a new multiplex cinema. Take bus 9 from Pl Oued al-Makhazine, just west of Pl des Nations Unies.

Sleeping

Youth Hostel (☎ 022 220551; fax 022 227677; 6 Pl Ahmed el-Bidaoui; dm/d/tr incl breakfast US\$5/14/20, sheets US\$0.60; ☎ 8–10am & noon–11pm; ♿) Clustered around a bright central lounge area, the rooms here are basic but well kept, with high ceilings and a lingering smell of damp in winter.

Hôtel Galia (☎ 022 481694; 19 Rue ibn Batouta; s with/without shower US\$19/17, d with/without shower US\$28/25) Tiled floors, plastic flowers, gold tasselled curtains and matching bedspreads adorn the rooms at the Galia, a top-notch budget option with excellent-value rooms and a rather dubious taste in décor. Management is friendly and helpful.

Hôtel Guynemer (☎ 022 275764; www.geocities.com/guynemerhotel; 2 Rue Mohammed Bellou; s/d/tr incl breakfast US\$42/61/76; ♿) This family-run hotel has 29 recently redecorated rooms tastefully decked out in cheerful colours. Fresh flowers, TVs, new bathroom fittings and firm, comfortable beds make them a steal and the service is way above average. There's also wi-fi access in the lobby and a dedicated PC for guest use.

Hôtel Transatlantique (☎ 022 294551; www.transatcasa.com; 79 Rue Chaouia; s/d US\$70/84; ♿) Set in one of Casa's Art Deco gems, this 1922 hotel has buckets of neo-Moorish character. The grand scale, decorative plaster, spidery wrought-ironwork and eclectic mix of knick-knacks give it a whiff of colonial-era decadence crossed with '70s retro. There's a lovely outdoor seating area and comfortable, but fairly plain, bedrooms.

Hôtel le Littoral (☎ 022 797373; www.hotel-littoral.ma; Blvd de l'Océan Atlantique, Ain Diab; s/d US\$79/96; ♿) This cavernous, well-kept hotel is rather dark with rooms that were once the height of fashion but now look dangerously '80s. However, they've got large balconies and wonderful views over the waterfront.



Eating

La Petite Perle (☎ 022 2272849; 17-19 Ave Houmane el-Fetouaki; mains US\$2.50-5; ☎ 11.30am-3pm & 6-11pm) Popular with young professionals and a quiet break for women travelling alone, this spotless, modern café serves up a range of sandwiches, crêpes, pastas and pizzas as well as a great choice of breakfasts.

Café Maure (☎ 022 260960; Blvd des Almohades; mains US\$7-10; ☎ 10-12am, to 6pm in winter) Nestled in the ochre walls of the *sqala* (an 18th-century fortified bastion), this lovely restaurant is a tranquil escape from the city. The menu favours seafood and salads, although meat dishes are also available. The exotic fruit juices are simply sublime.

Taverne du Dauphin (☎ 022 221200; 115 Blvd Houphouët Boigny; mains US\$8-10, set menu US\$12; ☎ Mon-Sat) A Casablanca institution, this traditional Provençal restaurant and bar has been serving up *fruits de mer* since it opened in 1958. On first glance it's a humble, family-run place but one taste of the succulent grilled fish, fried calamari and *crevettes royales* (royal shrimps) will leave you smitten.

Le Rouget de l'Isle (☎ 022 294740; 16 Rue Rouget de l'Isle; mains US\$10-15; ☎ closed Sat lunch & Sun) Sleek, stylish and renowned for its simple but delicious French food, Le Rouget is one of Casa's top spots. Set in a renovated 1930s villa, it is an elegant place filled with period furniture and contemporary artwork. The impeccable food is reasonably priced and there's a beautiful garden. Book in advance.

Restaurant al-Mounia (☎ 022 222669; 95 Rue Prince Moulay Abdallah; mains US\$10-16) Dine in style at this wonderfully traditional restaurant where you can choose to sit in the elegant Moroccan salon or the cool, leafy garden to enjoy the sumptuous Moroccan cuisine. There's a selection of salads worthy of any vegetarian restaurant and an array of exotic delicacies such as chicken *pastilla* and pigeon with raisins.

La Fibule (☎ 022 360641; Blvd de la Corniche, Phare el-Hank; mains around US\$28; ☎) Subtle lighting, warm colours and traditional décor give La Fibule a wonderfully inviting atmosphere. The food here is traditional Moroccan and Lebanese and is lovingly prepared and presented at low tables overlooking the ocean.

Drinking & Entertainment

Café Alba (☎ 022 227154; 59-61 Rue Driss Lahrizi; ☎ 8-1am) High ceilings, swish, modern furniture and subtle lighting mark this café out from the

more traditional smoky joints around town. It's hassle-free for women and a great place for watching Casa's up-and-coming.

La Bodéga (☎ 022 541842; 129 Rue Allah ben Abdellah; ☎ 12.30-3pm & 7pm-midnight) Hip, happening and loved by a mixed-aged group of Casablanca's finest, La Bodéga is a tapas bar where the music (everything from salsa to Arabic pop) is loud and the alcohol flows freely. It's a fun place with a lively atmosphere and a packed dance floor after 10pm.

Petit Poucet (Blvd Mohammed V; ☎ 9am-10pm) A die-hard relic of 1920s France, this strictly male-only bar was where Saint-Exupéry, the French author and aviator, used to spend time between mail-flights across the Sahara. Today, the bar is pretty low key but it's an authentic slice of old-time Casa life.

La Petite Roche (☎ 022 395748; Blvd de la Corniche, Phare el-Hank; ☎ 12.30-3pm & 7pm-midnight) With stunning views across to Hassan II Mosque, La Petite Roche is another favourite Casa hang-out. Littered with pillows thrown across low-level seating and lit by an army of candles, this place has a laid-back but exotic atmosphere.

The beachfront suburb of Aïn Diab is the place for late-night drinking and dancing. However, hanging out with Casablanca's beautiful people for a night on the town doesn't come cheap. Expect to pay at least US\$12 to get in and as much again for your drinks. The strip of disco joints along the beachfront ranges from cabaret-style bar-club-restaurants such as **Balcon 33** (33 Blvd de la Corniche) to the pastel-coloured pop sensation **Candy Bar** (55 Blvd de la Corniche) and the catch-all **VIP club** (Rue des Dunes).

Getting There & Away

BUS

The modern **CTM bus station** (☎ 022 541010; 23 Rue Léon L'Africain) has daily CTM departures as outlined in the table below.

Destination	Fare (US\$)	Duration (hr)	Daily services
Essaouira	13.60	7	3
Fès	10	5	12
Marrakesh	8	4	9
Meknès	8	4	11
Rabat	2.80	1	11
Tangier	14	6	6
Tetouan	14	7	3

The modern **Gare Routière Ouled Ziane** (☎ 022 444470), 4km southeast of the centre, is the bus station for non-CTM services.

TRAIN

All long-distance trains as well as trains to Mohammed V International Airport depart from **Casa-Voyageurs train station** (☎ 022 243818), 4km east of the city centre. Catch bus 30 (US\$0.40), which runs all down Blvd Mohammed V, or hop in a taxi and pay about US\$1.20 to get there. Destinations from Casa-Voyageurs include Marrakesh (US\$9, three hours, nine daily), Fès (US\$11, 4½ hours, nine daily) via Meknès (US\$9, 3½ hours, nine daily) and Tangier (US\$13, 5½ hours, three daily).

The **Casa-Port train station** (☎ 022 223011) is a few hundred metres northeast of Pl des Nations Unies. Although the station is more convenient than Casa-Voyageurs, the only trains that run from it are those to Rabat (US\$3.40, one hour).

Getting Around

The easiest way to get from Mohammed V International Airport to Casablanca is by train (US\$3.40, 2nd class, 35 minutes); they leave every hour from 6am to midnight from below the ground floor of the airport terminal building. A *grand taxi* between the airport and the city centre costs US\$28.

Casa's red *petits taxis* are excellent value. The minimum fare is US\$0.80, but expect to pay US\$1.20 in or near the city centre.

ESSAOUIRA

pop 69,000

The laid-back attitude, plum accommodation, artsy atmosphere, bracing sea breezes and picture-postcard ramparts make Essaouira a firm favourite on the traveller's trail. It's the kind of place where you'll sigh deeply and relax enough to shrug off your guarded attitude and just soak up the atmosphere.

Sights & Activities

Essaouira's walled **medina** was added to Unesco's World Heritage list in 2001, its well-preserved, late-18th-century fortified layout a prime example of European military architecture in North Africa. The mellow atmosphere and narrow winding streets lined with colourful shops, whitewashed houses and heavy old wooden doors make it a wonderful place to stroll. The easiest place to access the ramparts

is at **Skala de la Ville**, the impressive sea bastion built along the cliffs. Down by the harbour, the **Skala du Port** (adult/child US\$1.20/0.40; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 2.30-6pm) offers picturesque views over the fishing port and the **île de Mogador**.

A number of outlets rent watersports equipment and offer instruction along Essaouira's wide sandy beach. **Magic Fun Afrika** (☎ 024 473856; www.magicfunafrika.com; Blvd Mohammed V; ☎ 9am-6pm Mar-Dec) rents windsurfing equipment (US\$17 per hour) and surfboards (US\$7 per hour). It also offers kite surfing (from US\$28 per hour) and kayaking (US\$12 per hour, US\$37 per day).

Festivals & Events

The **Gnaoua & World Music Festival** is a four-day musical extravaganza held on the third weekend in June. It features concerts on Pl Moulay Hassan.

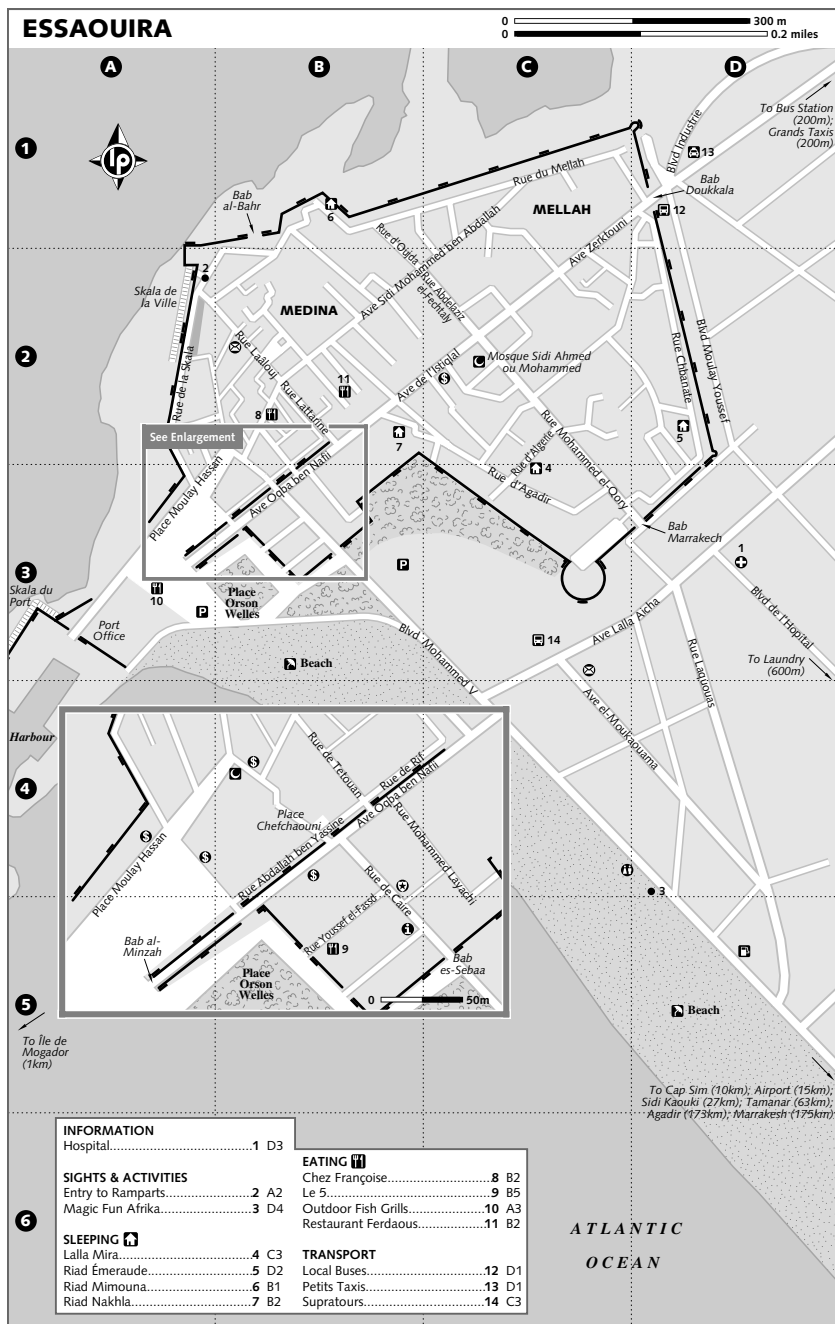
Sleeping

Riad Nakhla (☎ /fax 024 474940; www.essaouiragnet.com /riad-nakhla; 2 Rue d'Agadir; s/d US\$23/34) For budget travellers who have endured countless nights in grotty hotels, the Riad Nakhla is a revelation. The stone columns and the fountain trickling in the courtyard immediately make you feel like you're somewhere much more expensive, and the bedrooms, though simple enough, are immaculately kept. Breakfast on the stunning roof terrace is another treat.

Riad Émeraude (☎ 024 473494; www.essaouirahotel.com in French; 228 Rue Chbanate; s/d incl breakfast US\$38/50) This gorgeous little place opens up from a stunning central courtyard with stone arches and tiled floors to 12 charming rooms bathed in light. Elegantly simple with brilliant white linens, minimalist local touches and splashes of blues or yellow, these rooms offer incredible value for money.

Lalla Mira (☎ 024 475046; 14 Rue d'Algerie; www.lal lamira.ma; s/d/ste US\$49/78/104; ☎) Lalla Mira claims to be Morocco's first ecohotel and has a selection of simple rooms with ochre *tadelakt* (smooth-polished lime) walls, wrought-iron furniture, natural fabrics and solar-powered underfloor heating. The anti-allergy beds, onsite *hammam* (heated by solar power) and cheerful restaurant (mains US\$10 to US\$14) serving a good selection of vegetarian food are all nice touches.

Riad Mimouna (☎ 024 785753; www.riad-mimouna.com; 62 Rue d'Oujda; s US\$79-119, d US\$96-135, ste US\$170-215; ☎) This stunning new hotel offers



grand Moorish design with sumptuous ceilings carved from thuya (an indigenous Moroccan conifer), plush carpets, the whiff of incense as you walk into your room and glorious sea views. There's also a fantastic roof terrace, a *hammam* and a subtly lit restaurant (mains US\$18).

Eating

One of Essaouira's best food experiences is the outdoor fish grills that line the port end of Pl Moulay Hassan. Just choose what you want to eat from the colourful displays of fresh fish and seafood outside each grill, agree a price (expect to pay about US\$4.50 for lunch) and wait for it to be cooked on the spot.

Restaurant Ferdaous (☎ 024 473655; 27 Rue Abdesslam Lebadi; mains US\$6, set menu US\$8.50) Don't be put off by the grimy back street this place is on – it's one of the best spots in town for traditional Moroccan food. The seasonal menu offers an innovative take on traditional recipes and the low tables and padded seating make it feel like the real McCoy.

Chez Françoise (☎ 086 164087; 1 Rue Hommane el-Fatouaki; lunch set menu US\$6.80; ☎ Mon-Sat) An excellent choice for a light, healthy meal, this pared-back little place offers a choice of savoury tarts served with three tangy salads. It serves simple, well-made food and is a glorious find after a diet of tajine and kefta (lightly spiced meatballs).

Le 5 (☎ 024 784726; 5 Rue Youssef el-Fassd; menu US\$17; ☎ 7pm-11pm Wed-Mon & noon-3pm Sat & Sun) Deep purple seating, warm stone arches and giant lampshades dominate this slick newcomer on the Essaouira restaurant scene. It was *the* place to see and be seen in town at the time of research, and serves a good choice of international and Moroccan dishes.

Getting There & Away

The **bus station** (☎ 024 784764) is about 400m northeast of the medina, an easy walk during the day but better in a *petit taxi* (US\$0.70) if you're arriving or leaving late at night. CTM has two buses daily for Casablanca (US\$12, six hours) and one to Marrakesh (US\$6, 2½ hours).

Supratours (☎ 024 475317) runs buses to Marrakesh train station (US\$7, 2½ hours, four daily) to connect with trains to Casablanca. You should book several days in advance for this service, particularly in summer.

AGADIR

pop 679,000

Devastated by a terrible earthquake in 1960, Agadir has managed to rise from its ruins as Morocco's main beach resort. Rebuilt into a neat grid of residential suburbs and wide boulevards, the town feels strangely bereft of the sort of bustling life often associated with Moroccan cities. Its lure, however, lies in its huge sandy bay, which is more sheltered than many other Atlantic beaches.

Orientation

Agadir's bus stations and most of the budget hotels are in Nouveau Talborjt in the northeast of the town. From here it's about a 15-minute walk down to Blvd du 20 Août, the main strip, which is lined with cafés and restaurants and big hotels.

Information

Banque Populaire (Blvd Hassan II)

Crown English Bookshop (Immeuble A, off Ave Sidi Mohammed)

Délégation Régionale du Tourisme (ONMT; ☎ 028 846377; fax 028 846378; Ave Mohammed V; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 2.30-6.30pm Mon-Thu, 8.30-11.30am & 3-6.30pm Fri)

Internet Swiss (Blvd Hassan II; per hr US\$1.20; ☎ 9am-11pm)

Post office (cnr Ave du Prince Moulay Abdallah & Sidi Mohammed; ☎ 8.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-noon Sat)

Wafa Bank (Ave du 29 Feiner)

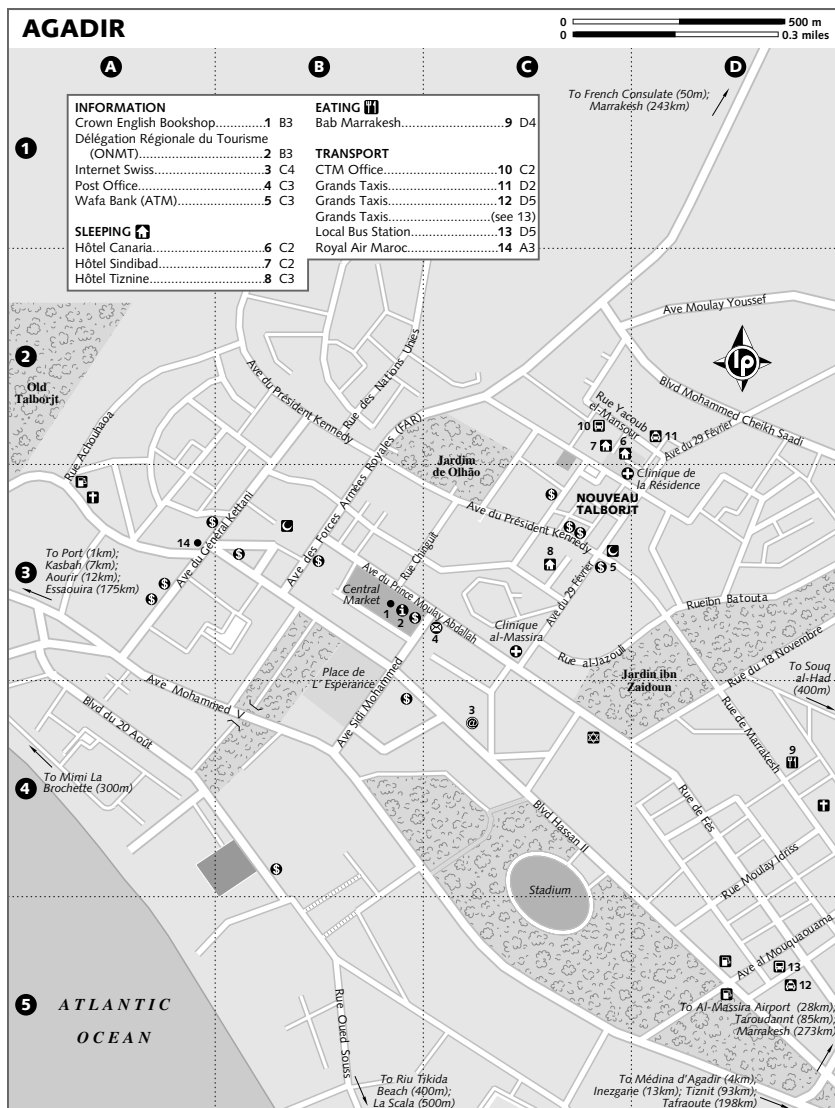
Sleeping & Eating

Hôtel Canaria (☎ 028 846727; Pl Lahcen Tamri; s/d US\$9/12) One of the better crash pads near the bus offices, Hôtel Canaria overlooks a pleasant square and the rooms are a notch above basic, with pine furniture and potted plants around the upstairs courtyard.

Hôtel Tiznine (☎ 028 843925; 3 Rue Drarga; s with/without shower US\$14/10, d with/without shower US\$17/14) This tidy hostel has immaculate rooms, arranged around a green-and-white tiled courtyard with geraniums. The showers and toilets are spotless, and the manager speaks good English.

Hôtel Sindibad (☎ 028 823477; fax 028 842474; Pl Lahcen Tamri; d US\$35; ☎) Popular midrange option, with smart rooms, all with TV, phone and a tiny balcony overlooking a square. It also has a bar, a restaurant, money-changing facilities (cash only), a small rooftop pool and sun terraces.

Riu Tikida Beach (☎ 028 845400; resabeach@tikida-hotels.co.ma; Chemins des Dunes; s/d from US\$127/180;



(P) (☎) (📞) (📺) Simply the best of the beach hotels, this tasteful low-rise building sits amid landscaped gardens with direct beach access. Rooms are set around internal courtyards, and onsite there is a Thalasso spa and Palace Nightclub, Agadir's most popular club.

Bab Marrakesh (☎ 028 826144; Rue de Massa; tajine for 2 US\$10, couscous US\$7, sandwiches US\$3-4) This is

the real thing, far removed from the tourist traps near the beach. Highly regarded by locals, it serves authentic Moroccan food at authentic prices.

Mimi La Brochette (☎ 028 840387; Rue de la Plage; mains US\$8-11) Up at the north end of the beach, Mimi's kitchen reflects her mixed origins: Jewish, French and Spanish. Her cooking

is divine, and the menu features everything from brochettes and pasta to smoked eel and duck's gizzards – they go down a treat with raspberry sauce.

La Scala (☎ 028 846773; Rue du Oued Souss; meal with wine US\$40) This excellent Moroccan restaurant is popular with wealthy Moroccans, Arab tourists and Westerners, which makes for a pleasantly cosmopolitan atmosphere. The food is elegant and fresh, and beautifully present. Book ahead.

Getting There & Away

For the moment, buses stop at their respective company offices along Rue Yacoub el-Mansour in Nouveau Talborjt, but they will all move to the new *gare routière* on Rue Chair al Hamra Mohammed ben Brahim, past the Souq el-Had, once it is finished.

CTM (☎ 028 822077) has buses to Casablanca (US\$18, nine hours, six daily). The 10.30pm bus continues to Rabat (US\$20, 10 hours, two daily). There are also departures for Marrakesh (US\$8, four hours, seven daily) and Essaouira (US\$6, four hours, one daily).

Getting Around

A comfortable **shuttle bus** (☎ 028 822139; www.almassirabus.com; adult/child US\$7/3.40) connects the airport with the city. *Grands taxis* (US\$23) and bus 22 also make the journey. Orange *petits taxis* run around town; prices are worked out by meter, so ask for it to be switched on.

TAFRAOUTE

pop 5000

Nested in the enchanting **Ameln Valley** is the village of Tafraoute. Surrounded on all sides by mountainous boulders, it's a pleasant and relaxed base for exploring the region. In late February and early March the villages around Tafraoute celebrate the almond harvest with all-night singing and dancing.

There are two banks in Tafraoute – **BMCE** (behind the post office) and **Banque Populaire** (Pl Mohammed V; ☎ Wed).

Sights & Activities

The best way to get around the beautiful villages of the Ameln Valley is by walking or cycling. Bikes can be rented from Artisanat du Coin (US\$7 per day). You can also rent mountain bikes or book a mountain-biking trip from **Tafraoute Adventure** (☎ 061 387173) and **Au Coin des Nomades** (☎ 061 627921), who offer

mountain-biking and trekking trips either up Jebel Lekst (2359m) or along the palm-filled gorges of Ait Mansour, which leads towards the bald expanses of the southern Anti-Atlas.

Sleeping & Eating

Hôtel Salama (☎ 028 800026; s/d US\$13/17; 📺) Hôtel Salama has some Moroccan flavour, with large, comfortable rooms, great views from the terrace and a *salon de thé* (tea room) overlooking the market square.

Hôtel Les Amandiers (☎ 028 800088; hotellesamandiers@menara.ma; s/d from US\$35/47; 📺 📺) Sitting on the crest of the hill overlooking the town, this is Tafraoute's top hotel. Designed in the kasbah-style, it has spacious ensuite rooms and a pool with spectacular views, as well as a bar and restaurant (menu US\$13.60).

Restaurant Marrakech (couscous \$2.80) A cheap, family-run restaurant on the road up from the bus station. It attracts a local crowd and knocks up a mean couscous.

Restaurant L'Étoile d'Agadir (☎ 028 800268; Place de la Marche Verte; mains around US\$4; 📺 8am-6pm) Locals swear by this place for its succulent tajines, all beautifully presented.

Getting There & Away

Buses depart from outside the various company offices on Sharia al-Jeish al-Malaki. Trans Balady has buses running to Agadir (US\$4.50, four hours, four daily). Other companies also service Casablanca (US\$14, 14 hours, five daily) and Marrakesh (US\$10, seven hours, four daily).

TAROUDANNT

pop 70,000

Hidden by magnificent red-mud walls and with the snowcapped peaks of the High Atlas beckoning beyond, Taroudannt appears a touch mysterious at first. It is, however, very much a market town with busy *souqs* where the produce of the rich and fertile Souss Valley is traded.

Information

There are three banks with ATMs on Pl Al-Aouyine, and all have exchange facilities and accept travellers cheques. **BMCE** also does cash advances. The main **post office** (Rue du 20 Août) is off Ave Hassan II, to the east of the kasbah. Internet access is available at **Wafanet** (Ave Mohammed V; per hr US\$0.90).

Sights & Activities

The 5km of **ramparts** surrounding Taroudannt are the best-preserved in Morocco, their colour changing from golden brown to the deepest red depending on the time of day. They can easily be explored on foot (1½ hours); preferably in the late afternoon.

Taroudannt is a great base for trekking in the western High Atlas region and the secluded **Tichka Plateau**, a delightful meadow of springtime flowers and hidden gorges. There are several agencies in town offering treks, but beware as there are many stories of rip-offs and unqualified guides.

Sleeping

Hôtel Taroudannt (☎ 028 852416; s/d/tr US\$14/16/18) Hôtel Taroudannt is an institution and by far the best budget hotel in town. Yes it is fading, but it has a unique flavour, from the jungle-style courtyard to the faintly colonial public areas. There's a restaurant (mains US\$8 to US\$10) on site, and the hotel organises great treks in the surrounding mountains with the excellent guide El Aouad Ali (☎ 066 637972).

Résidence Riad Maryam (☎ 066 127285; Derb Maalen Mohammed, off Ave Mohamed V; d with/without shower US\$68/45) This popular, family-run guesthouse offers five spotless and comfortable rooms around a cool courtyard full of trees and birdsong.

Riad Hida (☎ 028 531044; www.riadhida.com; d from US\$85; 🍷) The spacious rooms in this superb 19th-century pasha's palace are richly furnished and have windows onto a luxuriant garden, with peacocks and a fine swimming pool. It's located in Oued Berhil, 40km east of Taroudannt.

Centre Culturel & Environnemental (☎ 028 551628; www.naturallymorocco.co.uk; 422 Derb Afferdou; week package per person £215) Naturally Morocco is all about sustainable tourism and cultural contact. A package includes accommodation for the week, meals, excursions and cultural experiences; it needs to be booked online. The staff at the centre can arrange ecotours on botany, bird-watching, flora and fauna.

Eating

The best place to look for cheap eateries is around Pl an-Nasr and north along Ave Bir Anzarane, where you find the usual tajine, *harira* and salads.

Chez Nada (☎ 028 851726; Ave Moulay Rachid; set menu US\$8) West of Bab al-Kasbah, this is a quiet, modern place, famous for its excellent, good-value tajines. If you can, get a table on

the terrace with views over the surrounding flower-filled gardens.

Jnane Soussia (☎ 028 854980; outside Bab Zorgane; set menu US\$8.50; 🍷 dinner only; 🍷 🍷) This delightful restaurant has tented seating areas set around a large pool, in a garden adjacent to the ramparts. The house specialities are a mouth-watering *m'choui* (whole roast lamb) and pigeon *pastilla*, which have to be ordered in advance, but everything is good.

Getting There & Away

CTM has an office at Hotel Les Arcades, on Pl al-Alaouyine. It has the most reliable buses, with one daily departure for Casablanca (US\$17, 10 hours) via Marrakesh (US\$10, six hours). Other companies run services throughout the day to both these cities as well as to Agadir (US\$2, 2½ hours) and Ouarzazate (US\$8.50, five hours). All buses leave from the *gare routière* outside Bab Zorgane.

CENTRAL MOROCCO & THE ATLAS MOUNTAINS

Marrakesh is Morocco's showpiece performer, but it also serves as a gateway to wonderful trekking in the High Atlas Mountains and to the valleys and gorges that empty down into the Sahara with its astonishing dune-scapes.

MARRAKESH

pop 1.1 million

Capital of the south and epicentre of Moroccan tourism, Marrakesh is changing fast. Once the hub of camel caravans from the south, Marrakesh remains exotic, but just as Moroccans craved modern housing, Europeans arrived dreaming of old houses in the heart of the medina. This happy exchange has transformed the place, bringing money and work to a city that lives off its looks and its wits.

The looks are still there, as the first glimpse of its 16km-long, time-worn ramparts confirm. And some things have remained – the Djemaa el-Fna and the area around remains the beating heart of the city and the greatest *souq* in the south.

Orientation

The medina or old city and the Ville Nouvelle of Marrakesh are roughly the same size. It takes 30 minutes to walk from the centre of the Ville

Nouvelle to Djemaa el-Fna, the main square in the heart of the old city; you may want to use public transport between the two.

The main areas of the Ville Nouvelle are Guéliz and Hivernage. The latter is home to the majority of midrange and luxury hotels. In Guéliz you'll find the bulk of offices, restaurants, cafés and shops, plus a few hotels, clustered on or near the main thoroughfare, Ave Mohammed V. The train station lies southwest of Guéliz, following Ave Hassan II from the central Place du 16 Novembre. The main bus station is near Bab Doukkala; it's roughly a 10-minute walk northeast of this same square, and about 20 minutes from Djemaa el-Fna.

Most budget hotels are clustered in the narrow streets and alleys south of Djemaa el-Fna. The *souqs* and principal religious buildings lie to the north and the palaces to the south. To the southwest rises the city's most prominent landmark, the minaret of the Koutoubia Mosque.

Information

EMERGENCY

Ambulance (☎ 024 443724)

Brigade touristique (Map p182; ☎ 024 384601; Rue Sidi Mimoun; 📞 24hr)

INTERNET ACCESS

Cyber Park (Map pp180-1; Ave Mohammed V; per hr US\$0.60; 📞 9.30am-8pm)

Hassan (Map p182; ☎ 024 441989; Immeuble Tazi, 12 Rue Riad el-Moukha; per hr US\$0.90; 📞 7am-1am)

MEDICAL SERVICES

Pharmacie de l'Unité (Map pp180-1; ☎ 024 435982; Ave des Nations Unies, Guéliz; 📞 8.30am-11pm)

Polyclinique du Sud (Map pp180-1; ☎ 024 447999; cnr Rue de Yougoslavie & Rue ibn Aicha, Guéliz; 📞 24hr emergency service) A popular private clinic used by many resident expats.

MONEY

Crédit du Maroc (Map p182; Rue de Bab Agnaou; 📞 8.45am-1pm & 3-6.45pm Mon-Sat) ATM and money-changing facilities.

POST

Main post office (Map pp180-1; ☎ 024 431963; Pl du 16 Novembre; 📞 8.30am-2pm Mon-Sat) In the Ville Nouvelle.

Post office (Map p182; Rue de Bab Agnaou; 📞 8am-noon & 3-6pm Mon-Fri) A convenient branch office in the medina.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Office National Marocain du Tourisme (ONMT; Map pp180-1; ☎ 024 436131; Pl Abdel Moumen ben Ali, Guéliz; 📞 8.30am-noon & 2.30-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon & 3-6pm Sat)

Sights

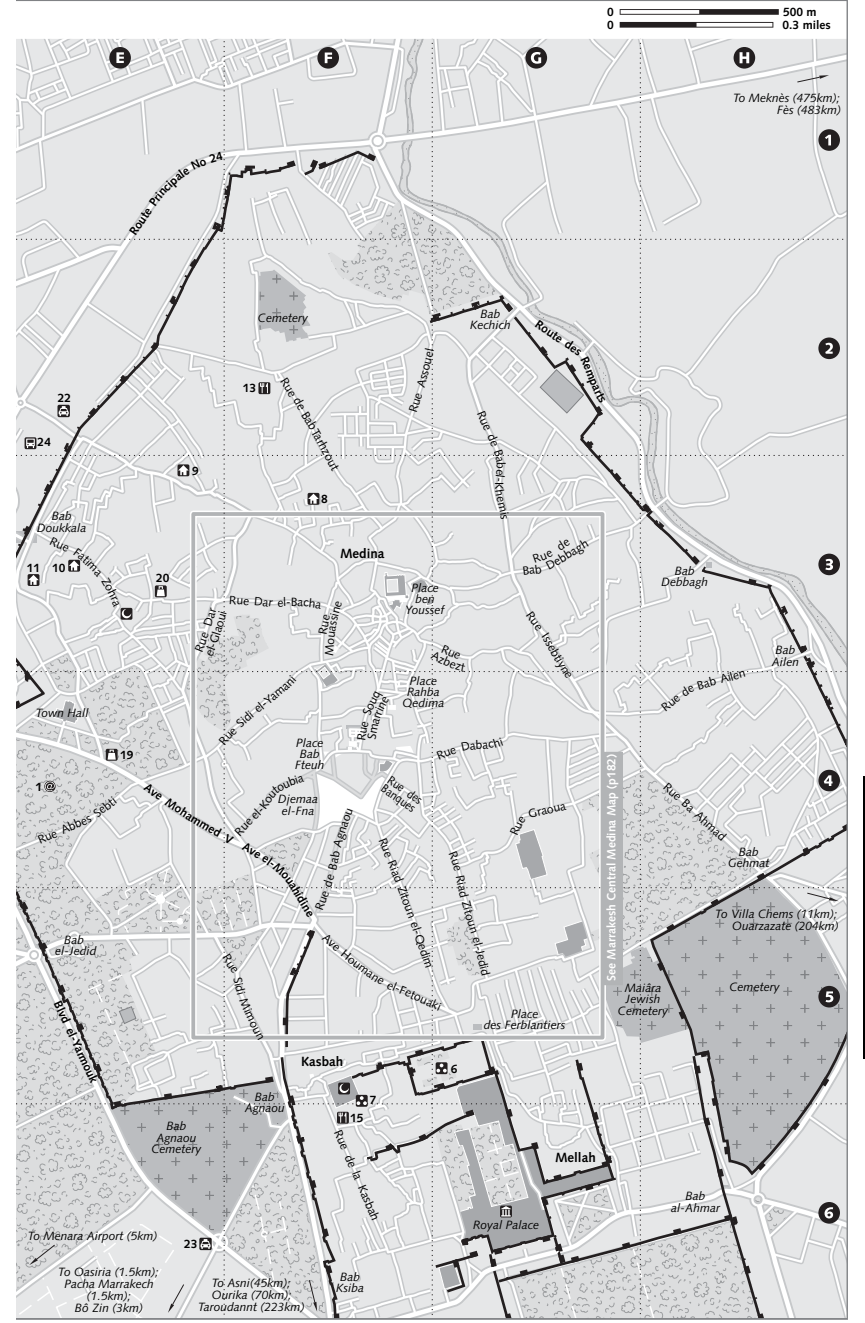
The focal point of Marrakesh is **Djemaa el-Fna** (Map p182), a huge square in the medina, and the backdrop for one of the world's greatest spectacles. Although it can be lively at any hour of the day, Djemaa el-Fna comes into its own at dusk when the curtain goes up on rows of open-air food stalls smoking the immediate area with mouth-watering aromas. Jugglers, storytellers, snake charmers, musicians and the occasional acrobats and benign lunatics consume the remaining space, each surrounded by jostling spectators.

Dominating the landscape, southwest of Djemaa el-Fna, is the 70m-tall minaret of Marrakesh's most famous and most venerated monument, the **Koutoubia Mosque** (Map p182). Visible for miles in all directions, it's a classic example of Moroccan-Andalucian architecture.

The largest and oldest-surviving of the mosques inside the medina is the 12th-century **Ali ben Youssef Mosque** (closed to non-Muslims), which marks the intellectual and religious heart of the medina. Next to the mosque is the 14th-century **Ali ben Youssef Medersa** (Map p182; ☎ 024 441893; Pl ben Youssef; admission US\$4.50; 📞 9am-7pm summer, 9am-6pm winter), a peaceful and meditative place with some stunning examples of stucco decoration.

Inaugurated in 1997, the **Musée de Marrakesh** (Map p182; ☎ 024 390911; www.museedemarrakech.ma in French; Pl ben Youssef; admission US\$4.50; 📞 9am-7pm) is housed in a beautifully restored 19th-century palace, Dar Mnebbhi.

South of the main medina area is the **kasbah**, which is home to the most famous of the city's palaces, the now-ruined **Palais el-Badi** (Map pp180-1; Pl des Ferblantiers; admission US\$1.20; 📞 8.30-noon & 2.30-6pm), 'the Incomparable', once reputed to be one of the most beautiful palaces in the world. All that's left are the towering pisé walls, taken over by stork nests, and the staggering scale to give an impression of the former splendour. The **Palais de la Bahia** (Map p182; ☎ 024 389564; Rue Riad Zitoun el-Jedid; admission US\$1.20; 📞 8.30-11.45am & 2.30-5.45pm Sat-Thu, 8.30-11.30am & 3-5.45pm Fri), 'the Brilliant' is the perfect antidote to the simplicity of the nearby el-Badi.



be hard to find elsewhere, such as lamb tajine with fresh figs, and *trid* (pigeon wrapped in a pancake).

Casa Lalla (Map p182; ☎ 024 429757; www.casalalla.com; 16 Derb Jamaa, off Riad Zitoun el-Qedim; set menu US\$40; 🕒 7-11pm Tue-Sun) Michelin-starred chef Richard Neat left Europe for a quieter life in Marrakesh. He runs a small unlicensed restaurant in his guesthouse, delights in shopping in the market every morning, and prepares a set six-course menu of beautifully presented delicacies that are a fusion of Moroccan and French *haute cuisine*. You need to book well in advance, bring your own wine (no corkage) and arrive at 8pm prompt.

La Sultana (Map pp180-1; ☎ 024 388008; set menu from US\$45; 🕒 lunch daily, dinner by reservation for nonresidents) The food is as refined, sumptuous and exotic as the setting – a happy fusion of French with traditional Moroccan – using only the freshest seasonal ingredients. Have a romantic dinner under the stars overlooking the Saadian Tombs or sit in the warm patio in winter.

Le Tobsil (Map p182; ☎ 024 444052; 22 Derb Abdellah ben Hessian, Bab Ksour; set menu incl drinks US\$68; 🕒 dinner Wed-Mon) Intimate and elegant, this French-owned place is downright classy. Service is impeccable, though perhaps less formal than at some of the other venues. Some foodies consider it the best restaurant in Marrakesh.

Drinking

The number one spot for a cheap and delicious drink is right on Djemaa el-Fna, where freshly squeezed orange juice is only US\$0.40. The juice stands are open all day and much of the night for a thirst-quenching, refreshing treat.

Kosybar (Map p182; ☎ 024 380324; http://kozibar.tripod.com; 47 Pl des Ferblantiers; 🕒 noon-1am; 🍷) The Kosybar combines three different venues within one riad near the *mellah*. The ground floor is a piano bar, the 1st floor a Moroccan salon, and, best of all, the gorgeous terrace overlooks the medina and the storks nesting on the city walls. It has one of Marrakesh's largest selections of wines.

Café Arabe (Map p182; ☎ 024 429728; 184 Rue el-Mouassine; 🕒 10am-midnight; 🍷) Another bar-tea-room-restaurant in a large riad in the medina, Café Arabe is perfect for a sunset drink or a light meal with a beer. The décor is funky Moroccan, with a large courtyard and more intimate salons inside, while the terrace commands great medina views.

Entertainment

Marrakesh no longer sleeps, and nightlife is fast becoming one of its attractions. Most of the hottest clubs are in the Ville Nouvelle or a new zone outside the city. Cover charges range from US\$17 to US\$34, including the first drink. Each drink thereafter costs at least US\$5.50. Dress smartly and remember that most places don't get going until after midnight or 1am.

Highlights include the following:

Atlas-Asni (Map pp180-1; ☎ 024 447051; Hôtel Atlas, 101 Ave de France; cover US\$17; 🕒 midnight-4am) A dark and exotic place where the crowd and music is predominantly Arab.

Montecristo (Map pp180-1; ☎ 024 439031; 20 Rue ibn Aicha; admission free with drink; 🕒 8pm-2am) A hugely popular Latin club and salsa bar.

Pacha (☎ 024 388405; www.pachamarrakech.com; Complexe Pacha Marrakech, Blvd Mohammed VI; admission Mon-Fri before 10pm free, after 10pm US\$17, Sat & Sun US\$34; 🕒 8pm-5am) A superclub that boasts famous DJs.

White Room (Map pp180-1; ☎ 060 595540; Hôtel Royal Mirage, Rue de Paris, Hivernage; admission US\$12; 🕒 10pm-dawn) For a groovy mix of contemporary Arab dance tracks, techno beats, 1980s new wave and salsa.

Shopping

Marrakesh is a shopper's paradise – its *souqs* are full of skilled artisans producing quality products in wood, leather, wool, metal, bone, brass and silver.

Ensemble Artisanal (Map pp180-1; Ave Mohammed V; 🕒 8.30am-7.30pm) To get a feeling for the quality of merchandise it is always good to start at this government-run place in the Ville Nouvelle.

Mustapha Blaoui (Map pp180-1; ☎ 024 385240; 142-4 Bab Doukkala; 🕒 9am-8pm) Knock on the huge, unmarked door and enter an Aladdin's cave – this is the best warehouse in town and the source of many of those chic riad furnishings.

Aya's (Map p182; ☎ 024 383428; 11bis Derb Jdid Bab Mellah; 🕒 9am-1.30pm & 3.30-8pm) The delightful Nawal and her husband Simohamed run this tiny boutique, a well-kept secret among local residents. Her gorgeous, very wearable clothes in wool, silk and cotton are based on traditional Moroccan designs and handmade by the finest tailors. Her shop is in the little alley beside the restaurant Douiria near Pl des Ferblantiers.

Getting There & Away BUS

The **main bus station** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 024 433933; Bab Doukkala) is just outside the city walls, a 20-minute walk from Djemaa el-Fna (a US\$0.60 to

US\$1.20 taxi ride). Services run to Fès (US\$14, 8½ hours, at least six daily) and Meknès (from US\$13, six hours, at least three daily).

CTM (Window 10, main bus station, Bab Doukkala; ☎ 024 434402) has buses servicing Ouarzazate (US\$8, four hours, one daily), Fès (US\$17, 8½ hours, one daily), Casablanca (US\$9, four hours, three daily) and Essaouira (US\$7, three hours, one daily).

TRAIN

For the **train station** (Map pp180-1; ☎ 024 447768, 090 203040; www.oncf.ma; cnr Ave Hassan II & Blvd Mohammed VI, Guélliz), take a taxi or city bus (buses 3, 8, 10 and 14, among others; US\$0.40) from the centre. There are trains to Casablanca (US\$9, three hours, nine daily), Rabat (US\$12, 4½ hours, eight daily) and Fès (US\$20, eight hours, eight daily) via Meknès (US\$17, seven hours). A night service goes to Tangier (US\$16 to US\$31).

Getting Around

A *petit taxi* to Marrakesh from the airport (6km) should be no more than US\$7. Alternatively, bus 11 runs irregularly to Djemaa el-Fna. The creamy-beige *petits taxis* around town cost between US\$0.60 to US\$1.70 per journey.

HIGH ATLAS MOUNTAINS

The highest mountain range in North Africa, the High Atlas runs diagonally across Morocco, from the Atlantic Coast northeast of Agadir all the way to northern Algeria, a distance of almost 1000km. In Berber it's called Idraren Draren (Mountain of Mountains) and it's not hard to see why. Flat-roofed, earthen Berber villages cling tenaciously to the valley sides, while irrigated terraced gardens and walnut groves flourish below.

Trekking

The ONMT publishes an extremely useful booklet, *The Great Trek Through the Moroccan Atlas* (1997), which contains a list of guides and trekker accommodation. Marrakesh's tourist office has the most reliable stock.

Treks of longer than a couple of days will almost certainly require a guide (US\$28 per day) and mule (US\$12; to carry kit and supplies). There are *bureaux des guides* (guide offices) in Imlil, Setti Fatma, Azilal, Tabant (Aït Bou Goumez Valley) and El-Kelaâ M'Gouna, where you should be able to pick up a trained, official guide. Official guides carry ID cards.

Club Alpin Français (CAF; ☎ 022 270090; www.caf.maroc.co.ma in French; 50 Blvd Moulay Abderrahman, Quartier Beauséjour, Casablanca) operates key refuges in the Toubkal area, particularly those in Imlil and Oukaïmeden and on Jebel Toubkal. The club website is a good source of trekking information and includes links to recommended guides.

JEBEL TOUBKAL TREK

One of the most popular trekking routes in the High Atlas is the ascent of Jebel Toubkal (4167m), North Africa's highest peak. The Toubkal area is just two hours' drive south of Marrakesh and easily accessed by local transport.

You don't need mountaineering skills or a guide to reach the summit, provided you follow the standard two-day route and don't do it in winter. You will, however, need good boots, warm clothing, a sleeping bag, food and water, and you should be in good physical condition before you set out. It's not particularly steep, but it's a remorseless uphill trek all the way (an ascent of 1467m) and it can be very tiring if you haven't done any warm-up walks or spent time acclimatising.

The usual starting point is the picturesque village of **Imlil**, 17km from Asni off the Tizi n'Test road between Marrakesh and Agadir. Most trekkers stay overnight in Imlil.

The first day's walk (10km; about five hours) winds steeply through the villages of Aroumd and Sidi Chamharouch to the **Toubkal Refuge** (☎ 061 695463; camping per person/tent US\$0.70/14, dm CAF members/HL members/nonmembers May-Oct US\$9/12/15, Nov-Apr US\$5/7/9, hot showers US\$1.20). The refuge sits at an altitude of 2307m and sleeps more than 80 people.

The ascent from the hut to the summit on the second day should take about four hours and the descent about two hours. It can be bitterly cold at the summit, even in summer.

OTHER TREKS

In summer, it's quite possible to do an easy one- or two-day trek from the ski resort of **Oukaïmeden**, which also has a Club Alpin Français (CAF; French Alpine Club) refuge, southwest to Imlil or vice versa. You can get here by *grand taxi* from Marrakesh.

From **Tacheddirt** (where the CAF refuge charges US\$6 for nonmembers) there are numerous trekking options. One of these is a pleasant two-day walk northeast to the village of **Setti Fatma** (also accessible from Marrakesh)

via the village of **Timichi**, where there is a welcoming *gîte* (literally 'resting place'; a village house with rooms and kitchen facilities). A longer circuit could take you south to **Am-souzerite** and back towards Imlil via **Lac d'Ifni**, **Toubkal**, **Tazaghart** (also with a refuge and rock climbing) and **Tizi Oussef**.

Sleeping & Eating

Hôtel el-Aïne (☎ 024 485625; Imlil; rooftop beds US\$3, r per person US\$4.50) Bright, comfortable rooms, hot showers and squat toilets are clustered around a tranquil courtyard with an old walnut tree. Below, the hotel's eatery, **Café de la Source**, serves reasonable food.

Dar Adrar (☎ 070 726809; http://toubkl.guide.free.fr/gite; Imlil; s/d incl breakfast US\$7/13, half board per person US\$12) This lovely place at the top of Imlil is run by one of the star guides of the Atlas, Mohamed Aztat. Dar Adrar has great views, peaceful rooms with hot showers, and an in-house *hammam*.

Café-Hotel Soleil (☎ /fax 024 485622; Imlil; d incl breakfast with/without bathroom US\$23/17) The rooms at this hotel are Spartan but clean; some rooms have beds, others have mattresses on the floor. Showers are hot. The café-restaurant on the terrace overlooking the river is among the village's most pleasant places for a meal (breakfast US\$2.80, lunch and dinner US\$7).

Kasbah du Toubkal (☎ 024 485611, 061 343337; www.kasbahdutoubkal.com; Imlil; d incl breakfast US\$170-260) This spectacular former summerhouse of the local ruler sits 60m above Imlil and has stunning views of the mountains. UK travel company Discover Ltd has restored and developed it along environmentally sustainable lines, involving people from Imlil in the project. The eight luxurious double rooms and three suites have been decorated with the utmost care and there is a library, a traditional *hammam*, open fires, board games and attentive staff. Discover Ltd also runs other luxury lodges in the region.

Getting There & Away

There are frequent buses (US\$1, 1½ hours) and *grands taxis* (US\$1.50) to Asni from Bab er-Rob in Marrakesh. Local minibuses and occasional taxis then travel the final 17km between Asni and Imlil (US\$1.50 to US\$1.80, one hour).

AÏT BENHADDOU

Ait Benhaddou, 32km from Ouarzazate, is one of the most exotic, best-preserved kasbahs in the Atlas region. This is hardly surprising,

since it has had money poured into it as a result of being used for scenes in many films, notably *Lawrence of Arabia*, *Jesus of Nazareth* (for which much of the village was rebuilt) and, more recently, *Gladiator*. The kasbah is now under Unesco protection.

The best place to stay is **Dar Mouna** (☎ 024 843054; www.darmouna.com; s/d incl breakfast US\$40/68, half board US\$50/85; ☎ ☎), a charming guesthouse with a welcome swimming pool and spectacular views over the kasbah. It has comfortable rooms tastefully decorated with local finds, and the atmosphere is really friendly. Dinner on the terrace overlooking the kasbah is a treat (mains from US\$12).

Three kilometres toward Tamdaght, **Defat Kasbah** (☎ 024 888020; fax 024 883787; camping per person/campervan US\$1.70/2.80, mattresses on roof US\$3.40, d with/without bathroom US\$16/12; ☎) is a beautiful budget place run by a charming French-Moroccan couple. It has a range of nicely decorated and very clean rooms, a fine swimming pool, a bar and a restaurant. Nonguests can use the pool for US\$2.80.

To get to Ait Benhaddou from Ouarzazate, take the main road towards Marrakesh as far as the signposted turn-off (22km). Ait Benhaddou is another 9km down a bitumen road. *Grands taxis* run from outside Ouarzazate bus station when full (US\$2.30 per person); chartering a *grand taxi* from Ouarzazate will cost from US\$28 for half a day.

DRÂA VALLEY

The magical Drâa Valley is a ribbon of technicoloured palmeraies, orchards, earth-red kasbahs and stunning Berber villages. It's a magical route, especially in the soft mauve light of the early evening. The longest river in Morocco, Oued Drâa originates in the High Atlas before reaching the Atlantic at Cap Drâa, just north of Tan Tan. In reality, the waters generally seep away into the desert long before they reach the sea.

Zagora pop 34,850

The modern town of Zagora is largely a French creation, although the oasis has always been inhabited. It was from here that the Saadians launched their expedition to conquer Timbuktu in 1591. The now famous, somewhat battered sign still reads 'Tombouctou 52 jours' (by camel caravan), although it took the Saadian army 135 days to get there.

Zagora feels very much like a border town, fighting back the encroaching desert with its lush palmeraie. Though modern and largely unappealing, it does have its moments, particularly when a dust storm blows up out of the desert and the light becomes totally surreal. The spectacular **Jebel Zagora**, which rises up across the other side of the river Drâa, is worth climbing for the views.

INFORMATION

The Banque Populaire, Crédit Agricole and BMCE are all on Blvd Mohammed V, and all have ATMs and are open during normal banking hours. **Pharmacy Zagora** (☎ 024 847195; Blvd Mohammed V; ☎ 8.30am-1pm & 3-8pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-1pm Sat) is opposite the Bank Populaire.

Placenet Cyber Center (95 Blvd Mohammed V) and **Cybersud** (Ave Hassan II) both offer internet access for Dh10 per hour.

ACTIVITIES

It may seem like everyone in Zagora has a camel for hire. Prices start at about US\$34 per person per day. In addition to the hotels, recommended agencies include:

Caravane Désert et Montagne (☎ 024 846898, 066 122312; http://caravanedesertetmontagne.com; 112 Blvd Mohammed V)

Caravane du Sud (☎ 024 847569; www.caravanedusud.com)

Caravane Hamada Drâa (☎ /fax 024 846031; www.hamadadraa.com in French; Blvd Mohammed V)

SLEEPING & EATING

Camping Les Jardins de Zagora (☎ 024 846971, 068 961701; Amezrou; camping for 2 incl tent & car US\$6, d US\$17) This clean camping ground is full of flowers and shady palm trees overlooking Jebel Zagora. Communal bathrooms are very clean. Also available are two simple rooms with private bathroom, and beds in small Berber tents with electricity (US\$3.40 per person). The hostess cooks delicious tajines to order (set menu US\$9).

Kasbah Tifawte (☎ 024 848843, 067 596241; www.tifawte.com; mattresses on terrace US\$6, half board with/without air-con US\$57/40; ☎) Hidden in a quiet backstreet, Kasbah Tifawte overlooks the palmeraie and the mountain. It has five traditional rooms uniquely and stylishly decorated but with the advantage of modern bathrooms.

Auberge Restaurant Chez Ali (☎ /fax 024 846258; chez_ali@hotmail.com; s with/without shower US\$12/8, d with/without shower US\$23/14) A real oasis, Chez Ali

has four impeccably clean rooms and four cosy Berber tents in the luxuriant garden. Home-cooked food (menu US\$9) can be eaten gazing at the greenery of the garden.

Villa Zagora (☎ 024 846093; www.mavillaousahara.com; Amezrou; d incl breakfast US\$57; ☎ ☎) This is undoubtedly the most charming place to stay in Zagora. The comfortable guesthouse has just five stylish and delightful rooms with beautiful paintings and a mosquito net, and very friendly staff. In winter, dinner is served by a roaring fireplace; in summer, you sit on the terrace with great views over the mountain and the palms (mains US\$14).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

A daily CTM bus travels from M'Hamid to Zagora (US\$2.30, two hours). Minibuses also connect Zagora with M'Hamid, while other daily buses leave Zagora for Boumalne du Dadès, Casablanca, Erfoud, Marrakesh, Ouarzazate and Rabat.

Tinfou

About 23km south of Zagora, you get your first glimpse of Saharan sand dunes, the **Tinfou Dunes**. If you've never seen a sandy desert, Tinfou is a pleasant spot to take a breather and enjoy a small taste, although the dunes at Merzouga or around M'Hamid are better.

Kasbah Sahara Sky (☎ 024 848562; www.hotel-sahara.com; s/d/tr US\$37/44/62; ☎) is a comfortable three-star hotel with well-appointed rooms and a good observatory on the roof. It also has a fully licensed restaurant, a snooker table and a *hammam*. Excursions to the dunes of the Erg Chigaga can easily be arranged from here.

The daily CTM bus that travels from M'Hamid to Zagora passes through Tinfou.

M'Hamid pop 3000

The oasis of M'Hamid is the end of the road. It used to be an important market place for the trans-Saharan trade, and the town's many different ethnicities (Blue Men, *Harratine*, Berber, *Chorfa* and Beni Mhamed) bear witness to that. M'Hamid Jdid, the modern town, is the typical one-street administrative centre with a mosque, a few restaurants, small hotels, craft shops and a Monday market. M'Hamid Bali, the old town, is 3km away across the Oued Drâa. It has an impressive and very well-preserved kasbah.

The dunes near M'Hamid, such as **Erg Chigaga** or **Erg Lehoudi** (Dunes of the Jews), are arguably as spectacular as Merzouga's, but with fewer hustlers and crowds. Most overnight camel treks cost from US\$40 per person. **Sahara Services** (☎ 061 776766; www.saharaservices.info), on the central square, is a reliable and professional agency in M'Hamid.

Right next door to (and owned by) Sahara Services, **Hôtel-Restaurant Les Dunes D'Or** (☎ 024 848009; s/d incl breakfast US\$4.50/8) is a small hotel with three simple but clean rooms and a good restaurant (mains US\$7.35) with a terrace where you can watch the world, or camels and 4WDs, go by.

At the entrance of M'Hamid is **Dar Azawad** (☎ 024 848730, 061 247018; www.darazawad.com; Douar Ouled Driss s/d incl breakfast US\$62/90; ♿ ♿ ♿), a comfortable hotel with 13 air-conditioned rooms stylishly decorated with Marrakshi flair. It also has a restaurant (set menu US\$12).

A daily CTM bus travels from M'Hamid to Zagora (US\$2.30, two hours), Ouarzazate (US\$7, four hours) and Marrakesh (US\$14, 12 hours). Minibuses also connect M'Hamid with Zagora, while other daily buses leave Zagora for Boumalne du Dadès, Casablanca, Erfoud, Marrakesh, Ouarzazate and Rabat.

DADÈS GORGE

The towering ochre-coloured cliffs and fabulous rock formations of the Dadès Gorge, are among Morocco's most magnificent natural sights. If there is a drawback, it's the crowds who are increasingly drawn here.

The main access to the gorge is from **Boumalne du Dadès**, a pleasant, laid-back place with a good Wednesday market. From there, a good sealed road wriggles past 63km of palmeriaes, fabulous rock formations, Berber villages and some beautiful ruined kasbahs to Msemrir, before continuing as dirt track to Imilchil in the heart of the High Atlas.

If you have plenty of time, you could easily spend several days pottering about in the gorge – watching nomads bring vast herds of goats down the cliffs to the river, fossicking for fossils and generally enjoying the natural splendour.

There are a number of places to stay; the kilometre markings of the following places refer to the distance into the gorge from Boumalne du Dadès.

Warmly recommended by readers, the **Hôtel la Kasbah de la Vallée** (☎/fax 024 831717; 28km; mat-

resses on roof US\$1.70, half board per person US\$17) offers clean, bright rooms with clean linen. The owner is licensed to organise tours, including guided day hikes and 4WD trips to Todra, and rents out mountain bikes (US\$12 per day).

Overlooking the river with a shaded camping area, **Auberge des Gorges du Dadès** (☎ 024 831719; www.aubergeaitoudinar.com in French; 25.5km; camping per person US\$1.70, s/d US\$20/27) has pleasantly decorated en-suite rooms, the best being on the 2nd floor.

The **Hôtel la Gazelle du Dadès** (☎ 024 831753; 28km; mattress on fl US\$2.30, s/d/tr rooms only US\$14, half board per person US\$15) has 16 neat rooms, all simply decorated with Berber bedcovers. They're good value, especially the ones at the front with views of the gorge. The (hot) showers and communal toilets are spotless.

The best hotel in the gorge is the stylish, elegant and comfortable **Chez Pierre** (☎ 024 830267; 27km; half board per person US\$62; ♿). The kasbah and its flowering terraces cling to the slopes of the gorge in an impossible balancing act. The airy rooftop pool and sun decks have precipitous views of the gorge and the restaurant is justifiably famous.

Grands taxis and minibuses run up the gorge from Boumalne du Dadès and charge US\$1.70 per person to the cluster of hotels in the middle of the gorge and US\$3.40 to Msemrir. You can ask to be dropped at your chosen hotel. To return, simply wait by the road and flag down a passing vehicle.

TODRA GORGE & TINERHIR

The spectacular pink canyons of the Todra Gorge, 15km from Tinerhir, at the end of a lush valley thick with stunning palmeriaes and Berber villages, are one of the highlights of the south. A massive fault in the plateau dividing the High Atlas from Jebel Sarhro, with a crystal-clear river emerging from it, the gorge rises to 300m at its narrowest point. It's best in the morning, when the sun penetrates to the bottom of the gorge turning the rock from rose pink to a deep ochre. In the afternoon it can be very dark and, in winter, bitterly cold.

Sights & Activities

This is prime trekking and climbing country. For treks, mountain-biking, rock-climbing and horse-riding expeditions, contact Driss at **Assettif Adventure** (☎ 024 895090; www.assettif.org in French). Advance booking is recommended, especially at busy periods.

Sleeping & Eating

TODRA GORGE

Auberge-Camping Le Festival (☎ 061 267251, 073 494307; aubergefestival@yahoo.fr; half board per person US\$34, d with/without shower US\$26/24, camping per person US\$2.80) Right in the heart of the gorge, this wonderful stone auberge has breezy rooms with fantastic views, furnished with wrought-iron beds and spotless white linens. The charming owner Adi, who built the house, speaks French, Spanish and English and can arrange trekking and climbing.

Hôtel Restaurant la Vallée (☎ 024 895126; s/d/tr incl breakfast without bathroom US\$8/9/14, with bathroom US\$17/23/28) With a brilliant location on the river, before the Yasmina, this simple hotel has eleven rooms, some renovated, some looking tired. Those on the 2nd floor have lovely views of the gorge. There are plenty of nice touches, including chequered tablecloths, fabric wall-hangings and clean communal facilities.

Hôtel Amazir (☎ 024 895109; s/d half board US\$42/55) On a bend in the road at the opposite end of the gorge, 5km before you enter, is the attractive and stone-built Amazir. Rooms are comfortable and bright (try for a balcony), and there's a lovely terrace restaurant by the riverside.

Hôtel Restaurant Yasmina (☎ 024 895118; www.todragorge.com; s/d/tr half board US\$25/34/54) A fantastic location beside the fjord and beneath the sheer rock walls at the heart of the gorge, the Yasmina has fairly small functional rooms and a good terrace restaurant (menu US\$8 to US\$12) to take in the views. Because of its location, it is overrun by tour groups during the day.

TINERHIR

Hôtel Tomboctou (☎ 024 834604; www.hotelomboctou.com; 126 Ave Bir Anzarane; s/d/tr half board US\$49/70/93, incl breakfast US\$40/53/68; ♿) Tinerhir's most characterful hotel is a kasbah built in 1944 for the local sheikh. Rooms tend to be small and dark and service irregular, so you are paying for the kasbah 'experience' rather than the room. There's a very mediocre restaurant. Mountain trekking and bicycle trips can be organised.

Kasbah Lamrani (☎ 024 835017; www.kasbahlamrani.com in French; s/d half board US\$55/65; ♿ ♿ ♿) Lamrani is a privately run *faux*-kasbah built in a kitsch Disney-esque fashion. The bright en-suite rooms are well equipped and have satellite TV and air conditioning. The hotel is opposite the Monday *soûq*, 2.5km west of town.

Getting There & Away

El Fath buses run from Tinehir to Marrakesh (US\$10, five daily) via Ouarzazate (US\$4.50), and to Casablanca (US\$16, one daily), Erfoud (US\$3.40, three daily), Meknès (US\$12, six daily), Rissani (US\$4, one daily) and Zagora (US\$8, one daily). Anything westbound will drop you in Boumalne du Dadès (US\$1.20).

MERZOUGA & THE DUNES

Erg Chebbi is Morocco's only genuine Saharan erg, an impressive, drifting chain of sand dunes that can reach 160m and seems to have escaped from the much larger dune field across the nearby border in Algeria. The erg is a magical landscape that deserves much more than the sunrise or sunset glimpse many visitors give it. The dunes are a scene of constant change and fascination as sunlight transforms them from pink to gold to red. The largest dunes are near the villages of Merzouga and Hassi Labied. At night, you only have to walk a little way into the sand, away from the light, to appreciate the immense clarity of the desert sky and the brilliance of its stars.

Merzouga, some 50km south of Erfoud is a tiny village, but does have *téléboutiques*, general stores, a mechanic and, of course, a couple of carpet shops. It also has an internet place, **Merzouga.net** (per hr US\$0.90; ☎ 8am-midnight), and is the focus of fast-expanding tourism in the area. As a result, it is acquiring a reputation for some of the worst hassle in Morocco.

Most hotels offer excursions into the dunes and it's here that they make their money. Asking prices can be high. At the time of our visit, prices ranged from US\$9 to US\$14 for a sunrise or, more usual, sunset camel trek lasting a couple of hours. Overnight trips (including a bed in a Berber tent, dinner and breakfast) ranged from US\$34 to US\$73 per person. Outings in a 4WD are more expensive, costing up to US\$136 per day for a car taking up to five passengers.

Sleeping & Eating

A string of camps and auberges, most built in similar kasbah style, flank the western side of Erg Chebbi for many miles to the north and south of the villages of Merzouga and Hassi Labied. Most offer half-board options, which isn't a bad thing as there aren't many stand-alone restaurants. In many of these places you can sleep on a mattress on the roof, in the salon or in a Berber tent for between US\$2.30 and US\$3.40 per person.

HASSI LABIED

This tiny village, 5km north of Merzouga and some way off the tarmac, has a good range of accommodation.

Kasbah Mohajut (☎ 066 039185; mohamezan@yahoo.fr; s/d/ste half board US\$18/23/25; 📍) A delightful, small kasbah with two courtyards and only eight rooms, all soothingly decorated in terracotta and two-colour *zellij*. It has nice attention to detail, including old doors, Berber rugs and wrought-iron fittings. Great value for money.

Kasbah Tomboctou (☎ 035 577091; www.xaluca.com; s/d half board US\$40/54; 📍) A big, noisy, popular place in an excellent location, with very friendly management and lots of excursions on offer. Rooms are large, well-equipped and decorated in *tadelakt*, communal facilities are spotless and the Ettayek family contagiously friendly.

Dar el Janoub (☎ /fax 035 577852; www.dareljanoub.com; s/d/tr incl breakfast US\$43/54/66; 📍) Seventeen pastel-painted rooms and four suites, all fully equipped, add up to Hassi Labied's smartest auberge. The pool is a major deciding factor if you are visiting in the heat.

MERZOUGA

Chez Julia (☎ 070 181360; s/d/tr US\$15/18/23) A lovely auberge in the heart of Merzouga, with nine spotlessly clean, simply furnished rooms in blues and yellow. The Moroccan ladies who run the place can cook up a storm of delicious Moroccan meals (US\$12); breakfast is available for US\$4.30. It's very popular and fills up fast.

Auberge La Tradition (☎ 070 039244; half board per person US\$17; 📍) Another would-be kasbah with simple en-suite rooms in a quiet location near the Ksar Sania and the foot of the dunes.

NORTH OF HASSI LABIED

Auberge Kasbah Derkaoua (☎ /fax 035 577140; half board per person US\$57; 📍) closed Jan, some of Jun-Aug; 📍) The furthest north of the auberges, one of the first signs when coming from Rissani, Kasbah Derkaoua is a world of its own, as benefits a former Sufi centre. Its walled compound is full of greenery, which shade a series of very comfortable chalets decorated in calming desert colours. It is extremely popular with families and organises some excellent excursions by camel, horse and 4WD. The food is a delicious combination of French and Moroccan and is served beneath the starlit sky.

Getting There & Away

Thankfully, the sealed road now continues all the way to Merzouga. Most hotels are located at least a kilometre off the road at the base of the dunes, but they are all accessible by car. The *pistes* (sandy tracks) can be rough and there is a possibility, albeit remote, of getting stuck in sand, so make sure you have plenty of water for emergencies and a mobile phone. Without your own transport you'll have to rely on *grands taxis* or on the minivans that run from Merzouga to Rissani and Erfoud and back.

MOROCCO DIRECTORY**ACCOMMODATION**

Auberges de jeunesse (youth hostels) operate in Casablanca, Chefchaouen, Fès, Meknès, Rabat and Tangier. Hotels vary dramatically, ranging from dingy dives to gorgeous guesthouses and fancy five-stars (the latter mostly in larger cities). Cities that see many tourists also offer gorgeous guesthouses in the style of a riad (traditional courtyard house).

Price categories in this chapter include budget (up to US\$45), midrange (US\$45 to US\$115) and top end (US\$115 and up); places are generally listed in order of price and include a private bathroom unless otherwise stated. Prices given are for high season and include tax; always check the price you are quoted is TTC (all taxes included).

Advance reservations are highly recommended for all places listed in this chapter, especially in summer.

ACTIVITIES**Camel Treks & Desert Safaris**

Exploring the Moroccan Sahara by camel is one of the country's signature activities and one of the most rewarding wilderness experiences, whether done on an overnight excursion or a two-week trek. The most evocative stretches of Saharan sand include the Drâa Valley (p186), especially the Tinfou Dunes and Erg Chigaga, and the dunes of Erg Chebbi (p189) near Merzouga.

Autumn (September to October) and winter (November to early March) are the only seasons worth considering. Prices start at around US\$34 per person per day (or US\$40 for an overnight excursion), but vary depending on the number of people involved, the length of the trek and your negotiating skills.

Hammams

Visiting a *hammam* (traditional bathhouse) is a ritual at the centre of Moroccan society (especially for women) and a practical solution for those who don't have hot water at home (or in their hotel). For travellers, it is an authentic local experience akin to visiting a spa – thoroughly cleansing and totally relaxing. Every town has at least one public *hammam*. A visit usually costs US\$1.20, with a massage costing an extra US\$1.70 or so.

Trekking

Morocco is a superb destination for mountaineers, offering a variety of year-round trekking possibilities. It's relatively straightforward to arrange guides, porters and mules for a more independent adventure. Jebel Toubkal (4167m), the highest peak in the High Atlas (p185), attracts the lion's share of visitors, but great possibilities exist throughout the country, including in the Rif Mountains around Chefchaouen (p157). Spring and autumn are the best seasons for trekking.

BUSINESS HOURS

Cafés 7am–11pm

Restaurants noon–3pm & 7–11pm

Shops 9am–12.30pm & 2.30–8pm Mon–Sat (often closed longer at noon on Friday)

Tourist offices 8.30am–12.30pm & 2.30–6.30pm Mon–Thu

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Morocco's era as a hippy paradise is long past. Plenty of fine kif (marijuana) is grown in the Rif Mountains, but drug busts are common and Morocco is not a good place to investigate prison conditions.

A few years ago the *brigade touristique* (tourist police) was set up in the principal tourist centres to clamp down on notorious *faux guides* (false guides) and hustlers. Anyone convicted of operating as an unofficial guide faces jailtime and/or a huge fine. This has reduced – but not eliminated – the problem. You'll still find plenty of touts hanging around the entrances to medinas and outside train stations, especially at Tangier port and near Bab Bou Jeloud in Fès. If you end up with one of these people remember their main interest is the commission gained from certain hotels or on articles sold to you in the *souqs*.

Official guides can be engaged through tourist offices and hotels at the fixed price of US\$14 per half-day (plus tip).

PRACTICALITIES

- For a full list of Moroccan newspapers online, go to **onlinenewspapers.com** (www.onlinenewspapers.com/morocco.htm).
- Radio Moroccan radio encompasses only a handful of local AM and FM stations, the bulk of which broadcast in either Arabic or French. Midi 1 at 97.5 FM covers northern Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia, and plays reasonable contemporary music.
- TV Satellite dishes are everywhere in Morocco and pick up dozens of foreign stations. There are two government-owned stations, TVM and 2M, which broadcast in Arabic and French.
- The electric current is 220V/50Hz but older buildings may still use 110V. Moroccan sockets accept the European round two-pin plugs.
- Morocco uses the metric system for weights and measures.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

For details of all Moroccan embassies abroad and foreign embassies in Morocco, go to www.maec.gov.ma.

Moroccan Embassies & Consulates

Morocco has diplomatic representation in the following countries, among others:

Algeria (☎ 60 74 08; 8 Rue des Cèdres, Parc de la Reine, Algiers)

Australia (☎ 02-9922 4999; Suite 2, 11 West St, North Sydney, NSW 2060)

Canada (☎ 613-236 7391; www.ambassade-maroc.ottawa.on.ca; 38 Range Rd, Ottawa, Ont K1N 8J4)

France (☎ 01 45 20 69 35; www.amb-maroc.fr; 5 Rue Le Tasse, 75016 Paris)

Germany (☎ 030-206 1240; www.maec.gov.ma/berlin; Niederwallstr 39, 10117 Berlin)

Japan (☎ 03-3478 3271; www.morocco-emb.jp; 5-4-30 Miami Aoyama Minat 107-0062, Tokyo)

Mauritania (☎ 525 14 11; sifmanktt@mauritell.mr; Av du Général de Gaulle, BP 621, Nouakchott)

The Netherlands (☎ 070-346 9617; www.marokkaanse-ambassade.nl; Oranjestraat 9, 2514 JB, The Hague)

Spain (☎ 91 563 1090; www.maec.gov.ma/madrid; Calle Serrano 179, 28002 Madrid)

UK (☎ 020-7581 5001; mail@sisfamaldn.org; 49 Queen's Gate Gardens, London SW7 5NE)

US (☎ 202-462 7979; fmehdi@embassyofmorocco.us; 1601 21st St NW, Washington, DC 20009)

Embassies & Consulates in Morocco

Countries with diplomatic representation in Rabat (Map pp148–9) include:

Algeria (☎ 212 - 37 76 559; Angle 31 cr rue Ouid Fes & ave al Ab Tal Agdal, Rabat 212)

Belgium (☎ 037 268060; info@ambabel-rabat.org.ma; 6 Ave de Marrakesh)

Canada (☎ 037 687400; fax 037 687430; 13 Rue Jaafar as-Sadiq, Agdal)

France (☎ 037 689700; www.ambafrance-ma.org; 3 Rue Sahnoun, Agdal)

Germany (☎ 037 709662; www.amballemagne-rabat.ma; 7 Rue Madnine)

Italy (☎ 037 706598; ambaciata@iambitalia.ma; 2 Rue Idriss el-Azhar)

Japan (☎ 037 631782; fax 037 750078; 39 Ave Ahmed Balafrej Souissi)

Mauritania (☎ 037 656678; ambassadeur@mauritanie.org.ma; 7 Rue Thami Lamdaouar, Soussi I)

The Netherlands (☎ 037 219600; nlgovrab@mtds.com; 40 Rue de Tunis)

Spain (☎ 037 633900; emb.rabat@mae.es; Rue Ain Khalouiya)

UK (☎ 037 238600; www.britain.org.ma; 17 Blvd de la Tour Hassan)

US (☎ 037 762265; www.usembassy.ma; 2 Ave de Marrakesh)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Religious festivals are of more significance to Moroccans, but local *moussems* (saints days) are held all over the country throughout the year and some draw big crowds.

Major festivals include the following:

Festival of Folklore (www.maghebarts.ma in French) Held in Marrakesh in June.

Gnaoua & World Music Festival (www.festival-gnaoua.co.ma) Held in Essaouira on the third weekend in June.

Festival of World Sacred Music (www.fezfestival.org) Held in Fès during June and July.

International Cultural Festival Held in Asilah during July and August.

Moussems of Moulay Idriss II Held during September and October, the largest city *moussems* in holy Fès when thousands gather to watch the processions to the saint's tomb.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

Homosexual acts (including kissing) are officially illegal in Morocco – in theory you can go to jail and/or be fined. In practice, although not openly admitted or shown, male homosexuality remains relatively common

and platonic affection is freely shown, more so among men than women. In most places, discretion is the key and public displays of affection should be avoided (aggression towards gay male travellers is not unheard of) – this advice applies equally to homosexual and heterosexual couples as a means of showing sensitivity to local feelings.

Some towns are certainly more gay-friendly than others, with Marrakesh winning the prize, followed by Tangier. That said, gay travellers generally follow the same itineraries as everyone else and although 'gay' bars can be found here and there, Moroccan nightlife tends to include something for everybody.

Useful websites which give the lowdown on local laws and attitudes to homosexuality include the following:

Behind the Mask (www.mask.org.za/index.php?page=morocco) Detailed information for every African country.

Gay Morocco (http://gaymorocco.tripod.com) Yahoo! discussion groups for gay travellers to and residents of Morocco.

Global Gayz (www.globalgayz.com) Another good resource with good links on Morocco.

Kelma (www.kelma.org) Website for gays from North Africa.

Spartacus International Gay Guide (www.spartacusworld.com/gayguide) Renowned guide to gay travel around the world with frequent information on Morocco.

HOLIDAYS

All banks and post offices and most shops shut on the main public holidays, including the following:

New Year's Day 1 January

Independence Manifesto 11 January

Labour Day 1 May

Feast of the Throne 30 July

Allegiance of Oued-Eddahab 14 August

Anniversary of the King's & People's Revolution 20 August

Young People's Day 21 August

Anniversary of the Green March 6 November

Independence Day 18 November

In addition to secular holidays there are many national and local Islamic holidays and festivals, all tied to the lunar calendar.

Aid al-Adha Marks the end of the Islamic year. Most things shut down for four or five days.

Aid al-Fitr Held at the end of the month-long Ramadan fast, which occurs during September or October (depending on the calendar) and is observed by most Muslims. The festivities last four or five days, during which Morocco grinds to a halt.

Mawlid an-Nabi (Mouloud) Celebrates the birthday of the Prophet Mohammed.

FESTIVAL OF FOLKLORE

Now more than 40 years old, the Festival of Folklore is a unique celebration of Berber culture. The all-singing, folk-dancing extravaganza – which takes place every year in June in Marrakesh – features many of the country's best performers. All performances take place in the grounds of the magnificent Palais el-Badi.

Each year the festival takes a different theme, such as wedding ceremonies or war rituals. Troupes from all over Morocco sing their songs and dance, reflecting the country's wide variety of ethnic groups and their specific traditions and culture. There are Berbers and Guedra, but it is often the Gnawa, with their sub-Saharan origins, who steal the show. Using lutes, drums, castanets, shells and beads, they produce a hypnotic sound, which builds to a crescendo. The music inspires them to break into tremendous acrobatic displays.

Besides the performances, various groups host exhibitions, theme nights and academic meetings. The festival is also an excellent opportunity to witness the famous *fantasia*, a charge of Berber horsemen, which takes place each sunset outside the ramparts near Bab el-Jdid.

INTERNET ACCESS

Internet access is widely available, efficient and cheap (US\$0.60 to US\$1.20 per hour) in internet cafés, although connections can be slow.

MAPS

Michelin's No 742 (formerly No 959) map of Morocco is arguably the best map of the country. In addition to the 1:4,000,000 scale map of the whole of Morocco, including the disputed territory of Western Sahara, there is a 1:1,000,000 enlargement of Morocco and 1:600,000 enlargements of Marrakesh and the High Atlas, Middle Atlas and Meknès areas.

Preferred by many and with similar, often clearer, detail (and occasionally available in Morocco) is the GeoCenter World Map *Morocco*, which shows the country at a handy 1:800,000 scale.

MONEY

Guichets automatiques (ATMs) are now a common sight across Morocco and many accept Visa, MasterCard, Electron, Cirrus, Maestro and InterBank systems. Major credit cards are widely accepted in the main tourist centres, although their use often attracts a surcharge of around 5% from Moroccan businesses.

American Express, Visa and Thomas Cook travellers cheques are widely accepted for exchange by banks. Australian, Canadian and New Zealand dollars are not quoted in banks and are not usually accepted.

Tipping and bargaining are integral parts of Moroccan life. Practically any service can warrant a tip, and a few dirham for a service willingly rendered can make life a lot easier. Tipping between 5% and 10% of a restaurant

bill is appropriate. A supply of small coins is vital for the payment of taxis, tips and guides. It is a good idea to load up at a bank when you arrive so you are well prepared.

POST

Post offices are distinguished by the 'PTT' sign or the 'La Poste' logo. You can sometimes buy stamps at *tabacs*, the small tobacco and newspaper kiosks you see scattered about the main city centres.

The postal system is fairly reliable, but not terribly fast. It takes about a week for letters to get to their European destinations, and two weeks or so to get to Australia and North America. Sending post from Rabat or Casablanca is quickest.

The parcel office, indicated by the sign '*colis postaux*', is generally in a separate part of the post office building. Take your parcel unwrapped for customs inspection. Some parcel offices sell boxes.

TELEPHONE

All domestic phone calls in Morocco require a nine-digit number, which includes the three-digit area code (or GSM code). When calling overseas from Morocco, dial ☎ 00, the country code and then the city code and number. Morocco's country code is ☎ 212.

A few cities and towns still have public phone offices, often next to the post office, but more common are privately run *téléboutiques*, which can be found in every town and village on almost every corner.

Morocco has two GSM mobile-phone networks, Méditel and Maroc Telecom, which now cover 85% of the population. For a map

of the mobile coverage for Morocco's two carriers, click on www.cellular-news.com/coverage/morocco.php. Moroccan mobile numbers start with the codes ☎ 061 to ☎ 068.

TOURIST INFORMATION

The national tourism body, **Office National Marocain du Tourisme** (ONMT; www.visitmorocco.com), has offices in the main cities, with the head office in Rabat. These offices are often called Délégation Régionale du Tourisme. Regional offices, called Syndicat d'Initiative are to be found in smaller towns. Although there are some notable exceptions, most tourist offices inside Morocco are of limited use, offering the standard ONMT brochures and the simplest of tourist maps, along with helpless smiles.

VISAS

Most visitors to Morocco do not require visas and are allowed to remain in the country for 90 days on entry. Exceptions to this include nationals of Israel, South Africa and Zimbabwe; these people can apply for a three-month, single-entry visa (about US\$30). In all cases, your passport must be valid for at least six months beyond your date of entry.

As visa requirements change, it's a good idea to check with the Moroccan embassy in your country or a reputable travel agency before travelling.

The Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla have the same visa requirements as mainland Spain.

Visa Extensions

If 90 days is insufficient, the simplest thing to do is to leave (eg travel to the Spanish enclaves) and come back a few days later. Your chances improve if you re-enter by a different route.

Visas for Onward Travel

Algeria Although Algeria has now emerged from over a decade of civil war, the border with Morocco remains closed and visas are not being issued.

Mali Visas are required for everyone except French nationals and are valid for one month (US\$27), but are renewable inside Mali. Two photographs and a yellow-fever vaccination certificate are required and the visa is usually issued on the spot. Malian visas are available at Malian border posts, but by no means count on that if you're crossing at a remote desert crossing.

Mauritania Everyone, except nationals of Arab League countries and some African countries, needs a visa, which is valid for a one-month stay. These can be issued the same

day at the Mauritanian Embassy in Casablanca if you apply between 9am and 10am (get there by 8.30am). Visas cost US\$23 and you need two photos and an onward air ticket. They can also be obtained at the border for US\$25.

VOLUNTEERING

A good place to start looking for volunteer work is the Morocco page for **Volunteer Abroad** (www.volunteerabroad.com/Morocco.cfm), which provides links to NGOs with Morocco-specific programmes. Also worth getting hold of is Lonely Planet's *The Gap Year Book*, which lists hundreds of NGOs that organise volunteer and other work and study programmes around the world.

International or local NGOs that sometimes have Morocco placements or camps include the following:

Chantiers Sociaux Marocains (☎ 037 297184; ccsm@planete.co.ma; BP 456, Rabat) A local NGO with international links.

International Cultural Youth Exchange (www.icye.org) Allows you to search for upcoming Moroccan volunteer opportunities.

Jeunesse des Chantiers Marocains (<http://perso.menara.ma/youthcamps>; internationalcamps@yahoo.com) A nonprofit group that promotes cultural exchange through three- to four-week courses in Moroccan Arabic during which you stay with local families and take part in cultural events.

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

Women can expect a certain level of sexual harassment when travelling in Morocco. It comes in the form of nonstop greetings, leering and other unwanted attention, but it is rarely dangerous. It is best to avoid overreacting and to ignore this attention. In the case where a would-be suitor is particularly persistent, threatening to go to the police or the *brigade touristique* is amazingly effective. Women will save themselves a great deal of grief by avoiding eye contact, dressing modestly and refraining from walking around alone at night.

TRANSPORT IN MOROCCO

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Morocco's main international entry point is the **Mohammed V International Airport** (☎ 022 539040), 30km southeast of Casablanca. Other international airports include the following:

Fès Airport (☎ 055 674712) Fifteen kilometres south of Fès at Saïss.

Ibn Batouta Airport (☎ 039 393720) Eighteen kilometres south of Tangier.

Ménara Airport (☎ 044 447865) In Marrakesh.

Rabat-Salé Airport (☎ 037 808090) Ten kilometres east of Salé.

For comprehensive information on all of Morocco's airports, log on to the website of the **Office National des Aéroports** (www.onda.org.ma in French & Arabic).

Airlines flying to and from Morocco include the following:

Air France (www.airfrance.com; ☎ 022 294040)

Alitalia (www.alitalia.it; ☎ 022 314181)

British Airways (www.britishairways.com; ☎ 022 229464)

EasyJet (www.easyjet.com)

Iberia (www.iberia.com; ☎ 022 279600)

KLM-Royal Dutch Airlines (www.klm.com; ☎ 022 203222)

Lufthansa Airlines (www.lufthansa.com; ☎ 022 312371)

Regional Air Lines (www.regionalmaroc.com; ☎ 022 536940)

Royal Air Maroc (www.royalairmaroc.com; ☎ 022 321122)

Ryan Air (www.ryanair.com)

Land

The Moroccan bus company, **Compagnie de Transports Marocains** (CTM; ☎ in Casablanca 022 458080; www.ctm.co.ma) operates buses from Casablanca and most other main cities to France, Belgium, Spain, Germany and Italy. Buses to Spain leave Casablanca daily except Sunday. Book at least a week in advance.

Another Moroccan bus service with particularly good links to Spanish networks is **Tramesa** (☎ 022 245274; www.tramesa.ma). UK-based companies with service to Morocco include **Eurolines** (☎ 08705 808080; www.eurolines.co.uk) and **Busabout** (☎ 020-7950 1661; www.busabout.com).

ALGERIA

The border with Algeria has been closed for some time due to ongoing political disputes.

MAURITANIA

The trans-Saharan route via Mauritania is now the most popular route from North Africa into sub-Saharan Africa, and hundreds of adventurous souls do it every year.

The route into Mauritania runs from Dakhla south along the coast for 460km to Nouâdhibou across the border and then south

along the coast to the Mauritanian capital Nouakchott. It's advisable to fill up with petrol at every available station. Some stations south of Dakhla may be out of fuel, in particular, the last station 50km before the border.

Moroccan border formalities are processed in the basic settlement of Guergarat. The border, about 15km from the settlement, is heavily mined, so stay on the road. Coming from Morocco, you can buy the Mauritanian visa at the border (€20). Expect to pay another €20 for various 'taxes' on top of the visa price. Although there are no longer any currency declaration forms, some customs officials still ask for it and, of course, if you can't present it, they will expect a small bribe.

Note that there's no public transport between Morocco and Mauritania.

Sea

Regular ferries run to Europe from several ports along the Moroccan Mediterranean coast. The most trafficked is Tangier, from where there are boats to Algeciras, Spain (US\$40, 60 to 70 minutes, hourly); Tarifa, Spain (US\$28, 35 minutes, five daily); and Sète, France (US\$281, 36 hours, two weekly). Hourly ferries also run from Ceuta to Algeciras (US\$32, 35 minutes, hourly). Daily ferries go from Al-Hoceima (summer only), Melilla and Nador to Almeria and Malaga in Spain. Taking a bicycle onboard is an additional US\$10 to US\$20, while a car is US\$64 to US\$102. Children travel for half the price. Tickets are available at the port of departure or from any travel agent in town.

Ferry companies include the following: **Comarit** (www.comarit.com) Casablanca (☎ 022 293320; Blvd d'Anfa); Tangier (☎ 039 947402; Tangier Port) **Ferry Rapidos del Sur** (FRS; www.frs.ma) Morocco (☎ 039 942612); Spain (☎ 956 681830) **Transmediterránea** (☎ 902 454645; www.transmediterranea.es; Calle Alcalá 61, Madrid)

GETTING AROUND Air

Royal Air Maroc (RAM; ☎ in Casablanca 022 912000; www.royalairmaroc.com) dominates the Moroccan air industry with paltry competition from **Regional Air Lines** (☎ in Casablanca 022 538080). Internal airports serviced by RAM include Casablanca, Essaouira, Fès, Marrakesh, Rabat and Tangier.

Student and under-26 youth discounts of 25% are available on all RAM domestic flights – but this is only if the ticket is bought

in advance from one of their offices. Group reductions are available and children aged from two to 12 travel at half price.

Bicycle

There are no special road rules pertaining to cyclists and they're really not given much consideration by drivers. Distances are great and those on bikes will need to carry all supplies with them (including any spare parts you may need, food and plenty of drinking water). You can transport bikes on both buses and trains.

Bus

A dense network of buses operates throughout Morocco, with many private companies competing for business alongside the main national carrier, **Compagnie de Transports Marocains** (CTM; ☎ in Casablanca 022 753677; www.ctm.co.ma).

The ONCF train company runs buses through Supratours to widen its train network. Morocco's other bus companies are all privately owned and only operate regionally. It's best to book ahead for CTM and Supratours buses.

Bus travel is relatively cheap considering the distances that have to be covered. Typical fares from Casablanca to Marrakesh, Fès and Tangier are US\$8, US\$10 and US\$14. More often than not you'll be charged for baggage handling – US\$0.60 is common.

Car & Motorcycle

Taking your own vehicle to Morocco is straightforward. In addition to your vehicle registration document and an International Driving Permit (although many foreign licences, including US and EU, are acceptable), a Green Card (proof of insurance for your vehicle) is required from the car's insurer. Not all insurers cover Morocco.

Renting a car in Morocco isn't cheap, starting from US\$395 per week or US\$57 per day for a basic car with unlimited mileage. Most companies demand a returnable cash deposit (US\$340 to US\$565) unless you pay by credit card. The best cities in which to hire cars are Casablanca, Marrakesh and Tangier, where the competition is greatest and prices lower. However, it is usually cheaper to arrange car rental in advance through a travel agent or international agency.

By law, insurance must be sold along with all rental agreements.

In Morocco you drive on the right, as in Continental Europe. Speed limits in built-up

areas range from 40km/h. Outside towns there is a national speed limit of 100km/h, rising to 120km/h on the motorways. It's compulsory for drivers and passengers to wear seat belts in cars, but no-one does.

In many Moroccan towns, parking zones are watched by *gardiens de voitures* in characteristic blue coats. The going rate is US\$0.40 for a few hours and US\$1.20 overnight. In an increasing number of big city centres, parking tickets are issued from blue kerbside machines (US\$0.30 per hour for a maximum stay of 2½ hours). Parking is free on Sundays.

Petrol in the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla is tax-free, so drivers heading to Morocco and mainland Spain via the enclaves should arrive with a near-empty tank. Moroccan mechanics are generally extremely good and all decent-size towns will have a garage.

Local Transport

The elderly Mercedes vehicles you'll see belting along Moroccan roads and gathered in great flocks near bus stations are *grands taxis* (shared taxis). They link towns to their nearest neighbours. *Grands taxis* take six extremely cramped passengers and leave when full.

Cities and bigger towns have local *petits taxis*, which are a different colour in every city. *Petits taxis* are not permitted to go beyond the city limits. They are licensed to carry up to three passengers and are usually metered.

Train

Morocco's train network is run by the **Office National des Chemins de Fer** (ONCF; www.oncf.ma in French). There are two lines that carry passengers: the line from Tangier in the north down to Marrakesh, and the line from Oujda in the northeast, also to Marrakesh, joining with the Tangier line at Sidi Kacem. The Belgian-made trains are comfortable, fast and preferable to buses. There are different 1st- and 2nd-class fares; 2nd-class is more than adequate.

Couchettes are available on the overnight *ordinaire* trains between Marrakesh and Tangier. The compartments fold up into six bunks (couchettes) and they're well worth the extra US\$10. Sample 2nd-class fares include Casablanca to Marrakesh (US\$8.50, three hours), Rabat to Fès (US\$8, 3½ hours) and Tangier to Marrakesh (US\$21, 9½ hours).

Children aged under four travel free. Those aged between four and 12 years get a reduction of 10% to 50%, depending on the service.

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