History

PREHISTORIC FLASHBACKS

Even when you see Morocco for the first time, you might experience déjà-vu. Maybe you recognise Morocco's green oases, striped purple canyons and rose-gold sand dunes from paintings by Henri Matisse, Winston Churchill or Jacques Majorelle. But there's a deeper, primordial connection here too. Exposed fossil deposits in the Anti Atlas make prehistory look like it was only yesterday, and High Atlas petroglyphs transmit mysterious messages across millennia. In the Atlas Mountains, Saharan steppes and red-earth valleys you can mark the exact strata where tectonic plates shifted billions of years ago, and civilisation surfaced from a rugged seabed.

The first movie shot in Berber was *Jesus' Film*, but the missionary movie missed its mark: its European distributors received mail from Moroccan viewers suggesting changes to make the film more believable.

The earliest evidence of human settlement here dates from 75,000 to 125,000 BC, when most of North Africa was covered in lush semitropical forest, and stone tools were cutting-edge technology. What the proto-Moroccan 'pebble people' really needed were radiators. The Ice Age wasn't kind to them, and left the country wide open for settlement when the weather finally began to improve around 5000 BC (and you thought English summers were gloomy).

LIVE FREE OR DIE TRYING: THE BERBERS

The fertile land revealed after the great thaw was a magnet for Near Eastern nomads, early ancestors of Morocco's Amazigh (plural Imazighen, loosely translated as 'free people') who may have been distant cousins of the ancient Egyptians. They were joined by Mediterranean anglers and Saharan horse-breeders around 2500 BC. Phoenicians appeared around 800 BC and East Africans around 500 BC, and when the Romans arrived in the 4th century they didn't know quite what to make of this multicultural milieu. The Romans called the expanse of Morocco and Western Algeria 'Mauretania' and the indigenous people 'Berbers,' meaning 'barbarians'. The term has recently been reclaimed and redeemed by the Berber Pride movement (see p35), but at the time it was taken as quite a slur.

For news feeds, links and articles in English and French on Amazigh culture, history and politics, visit www.amazigh-voice.com, an online Berber Pride forum.

The ensuing centuries were one long lesson for the Romans in minding their manners. First the Berbers backed Hannibal and the Carthaginians against Rome in a rather serious spat over Sicily known as the Punic Wars (264–202 BC). Fed up with the persistently unruly Berbers, the new Roman Emperor Caligula finally declared the end of Berber autonomy in the Maghreb (North Africa) in AD 40. True to his ruthless reputation, Caligula divided relatively egalitarian Berber clans into subservient classes of slaves, peasants, soldiers and Romanised aristocrats.

TIMELINE

Before recorded time...

According to Amazigh folklore, the earth's first couple birthed 100 babies and left them to finish the job of populating the planet – no mention of who changed all those nappies.

1–1½ million years ago

The Steve Jobs and Bill Gates of their day, precocious 'pebble people' living near what is today Casablanca begin fashioning stone tools some 250,000 to 700,000 years ahead of the European Stone-Age technology curve.

5000–2500 BC

Once the Ice Age melts away, the Maghreb becomes a melting pot of Saharan, Mediterranean and indigenous people. They meet, mingle and merge into a diverse people: the Amazigh.

WHEN PURPLE WAS PURE GOLD

The port that is today called Essaouira was hot property in ancient times, because it had one thing everyone wanted: the colour purple. Imperial purple couldn't be fabricated, and was the one colour strictly reserved for Roman royalty. This helps explain the exorbitant asking price, which according to Aristotle was 10 to 20 times its weight in gold. The natural dye came from the spiky murex marine snails that clung to the remote Purpuraire (Purple) Islands – as though that could save them from the clutches of determined Roman fashionistas.

Technically the Phoenicians were there first and discovered the stuff, but everyone wanted purple power. Savvy King Juba II established a coastal dye works in the 1st century BC to perform the tricky task of extracting murex dye from the vein of the mollusc, and kept his methods a closely guarded secret. The hue became wildly popular among royal celebrities of the day; Cleopatra loved the stuff so much that she dyed the sails of her royal barge purple to meet Mark Antony.

But violet soon turned to violence. Legend has it that Juba's son Ptolemy was murdered by Emperor Caligula for having the audacity to sport a purple robe, making trendy Ptolemy possibly the world's first fashion victim. The bright, nonfading dye was never successfully produced commercially, and the secret extraction methods were assumed lost in the siege of Constantinople in 1453. But in Essaouira the stuff is mysteriously still available, for a price. The mysteries of the colour purple are still passed down from one generation of murex collectors to the next, and jealously guarded.

This strategy worked with Vandals and Byzantines, but Berbers in the Rif and the Atlas were another story. They drove out the Romans with a campaign of near-constant harassment – a tactic that would later oust unpopular Moroccan sultans, and is still favoured by certain carpet salesmen today. Many Berbers refused to worship Roman gods, and some practiced the new renegade religion of Christianity right under Roman noses. Christianity took root across North Africa; St Augustine himself was a Berber convert.

Ultimately Rome was only able to gain a sure foothold in the region by crowning local favourite Juba II king of Mauretania. The enterprising young king married the daughter of Mark Antony and Cleopatra, supported scientific research and performing arts, and helped foster Moroccan industries still vital today: olive-oil production from the region of Volubilis (near Meknès), fishing along the coasts and vineyards on the Atlantic plains. Today you can still see Roman mosaics that were cut in Italy and assembled by Volubilis artisans into a curvy, sexpot goddess Diana – a hint of the stunning *zellij* (fitted mosaic) masterworks to come under Moroccan dynastic rule.

The most comprehensive Berber history in English is *The Berbers* by Michael Brett and Elizabeth Fentress. The authors leave no stone carving unturned, providing archaeological evidence to back up their historical insights.

The Roman foothold in Mauretania slipped in the centuries after Juba II died, due to increasingly organised Berber rebellions inland and attacks on the Atlantic and Mediterranean coasts by the Vandals, Byzantines and Visigoths. But this new crop of marauding Europeans couldn't manage

1600 BC

Bronze Age petroglyphs in the High Atlas depict fishing, hunting and horseback riding – a versatile combination of skills and cultures that would define the adaptable, resilient Amazigh.

950 BC

Amazigh rebuff Romans and their calendar year, and start tracking Berber history on their own calendar on January 13. Even after the Muslim Hejira calendar is introduced centuries later, the Berber calendar is maintained.

800–500 BC

The Maghreb gets even more multiculti as Phoenicians and East Africans join the Berbers, making the local population makeup as complex as a *ras al hanout* spice blend.

Mauretania, and neither could Byzantine Emperor Justinian. Justinian's attempt to extend his Holy Roman Empire turned out to be an unholy mess of treaties with various Berber kingdoms, who played their imperial Byzantine connections like face cards in high-stakes games. The history of Morocco would be defined by such strategic gamesmanship among the Berbers, whose savvy, competing alliances helped make foreign dominion over Morocco a near-impossible enterprise for more than a millennium.

THE POWER OF CONVICTION

An incisive look at religious life on opposite ends of the Muslim world, anthropologist Clifford Geertz's groundbreaking *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia* reveals complex variations within the vast mosaic of Islam.

By the early 7th century, the Berbers of Morocco were mostly worshipping their own indigenous deities, alongside Jewish Berbers and a smattering of local Christian converts. History might have continued thus, but for a middle-aged man thousands of miles away who'd had the good fortune to marry a wealthy widow, and yet found himself increasingly at odds with the elites of his Arabian Peninsula town of Mecca. This was no ordinary midlife crisis. Mohammed bin Abu Talib was his given name, but he would soon be recognised as the Prophet Mohammed for his revelation that there was only one God, and that believers shared a common duty to submit to God's will. The polytheist ruling class of Mecca did not take kindly to this new religion that assigned them shared responsibilities and took away their minor-deity status, and kicked the Prophet out of town on 16 July AD 622.

This Hejira (exile) only served to spread the Prophet Mohammed's message more widely. By the Prophet's death in AD 632, Arab caliphs – religious leaders inspired and emboldened by his teachings – were carrying Islam east to Central Asia and west to North Africa. But infighting limited their reach in North Africa, and it took Umayyad Arab leader Uqba bin Nafi until 682 to reach the Atlantic shores of Morocco. According to legend, Uqba announced he would charge into the ocean, if God would only give him the signal. But the legendary Algerian Berber warrior Queen Al-Kahina would have none of Uqba's grandstanding, and with her warriors soon forced Uqba to retreat back to Tunisia.

Although an armed force failed to win the Berbers over to Islam, force of conviction gradually began to succeed. The egalitarian premise of Islam and its emphasis on duty, courage and the greater good were compatible with many Berber beliefs, including clan loyalty broadly defined to include almost anyone descended from the Berber equivalent of Adam and Eve. Many Berbers willingly converted to Islam – and not incidentally, reaped the benefits of Umayyad overland trading routes that brought business their way. So although Uqba was killed by his Berber foes before he was able to establish a solid base in Morocco, by the 8th century his successors were able to pull off this feat largely through diplomatic means.

4th–1st century BC

Romans arrive to annex Mauretania and 250 years later, they're still trying, with limited success and some Punic Wars to show for their troubles.

49 BC

North African King Juba I supports renegade General Pompey's ill-fated power play against Julius Caesar. Rome is outraged – but then Roman senators pick up where Pompey left off, and assassinate Caesar a few years later.

25 BC–AD 23

Rome gets a toehold in Mauretania with farms, cities and art, thanks to North African King Juba II. He expands Volubilis into a metropolis of 20,000 mostly Berber residents, including a sizeable Jewish Berber community.

BERBER PRIDE & PREJUDICE

Despite a rich tradition of poetry, music and art dating as far back as 5000 BC, the Amazigh were often misconstrued as uneducated by outsiders, because no standard written language had been consistently applied to their many distinct languages. The Romans tried for 250 years to take over Amazigh territory and institute Roman customs – and when they failed they bad-mouthed them, calling them 'Berbers', or Barbarians. The name stuck, and so did anti-Amazigh prejudice among foreigners.

The Protectorate established French as the official language of Morocco to make it easier to conduct (and hence control) business transactions and affairs of state. Complex Amazigh artistic symbolism and traditional medicine were dismissed as charming but irrelevant superstition by those not privy to the oral traditions accompanying them, and the educated classes were encouraged to distance themselves from their Berber roots.

After independence (1955–6), Arabic became the official language, though French continues to be widely spoken among the elite. Since the Quran was written in Arabic, Moroccan religious instruction was in Arabic, and a hybrid Moroccan Arabic dialect (Darija) emerged in cities as a way to communicate across the many Berber languages. But Amazigh languages and traditions have persisted in Morocco, and the Berber Pride movement has recently reclaimed 'Berber' as a unifying term.

More than 60% of Moroccans now call themselves Amazigh or Berber, and Berber languages are currently spoken by upwards of 12 to 15 million Moroccans. Tashelhit is the most common Berber language, and is widely spoken in central Morocco. You'll also hear Tarifit along the Rif, Tamazight in the Middle Atlas and Tuareg in the Sahara. With the backing of King Mohammed VI – who is part Berber himself – the ancient written Tifinagh alphabet is now being taught in some schools as a standardised written Berber. Within the next decade, Berber will be taught in public schools across Morocco, along with the new lingua franca of trade and tourism: English.

THE CONVICTION OF POWER

The admiration between the Berbers and the Arab Umayyads was not always mutual, however. While the Umayyads respected Jews and Christians as fellow believers in the word of a singular God, they had no compunction about compelling polytheist Berbers to pay special taxes and serve as infantry (read: cannon fodder). The Umayyads greatly admired Berber women for their beauty, but this wasn't necessarily advantageous; many were conscripted into Umayyad harems.

Even the Berbers who converted to Islam were forced to pay tribute to their Arab overlords. A dissident school of Islamic thought called Kharijism critiqued the abuses of power of the Umayyads as a corruption of the faith, and called for a new moral leadership. In the mid-8th century, insurrections erupted across North Africa. Armed only with slings, a special force of Berbers defeated the elite Umayyad guard. The Umayyads were soon cut off from Spain and Morocco, and local leaders took over an increasingly lucrative trade in silver from the Western Sahara, gold from Ghana and slaves from West Africa.

Moulay Ismail was pen pals with England's James II and Louis XIV of France, and tried to convert the Sun King to Islam by mail.

200–429

Vandals and Visigoths take turns forcing one another out of Spain and onto the shores of Morocco, until local Rif warriors convince them to bother the Algerians instead.

533

Justinian rousts the last Vandals from Morocco, but his grand plans to extend the Holy Roman Empire are soon reduced to a modest presence in Essaouira, Tangier and Salé.

662–682

Arabs invade the Maghreb under Umayyad Uqba bin Nafi, introducing Islam to the area. Berber warriors eventually boot out the Umayyads, but decide to keep the Quran.

DYNASTIC DRAMAS

Looking back on early Berber kingdoms, the 14th-century historian Ibn Khuldun noted a pattern that would repeat throughout Moroccan dynastic history. A new leadership would arise determined to do right, make contributions to society as a whole and fill the royal coffers, too. When the pursuit of power and royal comforts began to eclipse loftier aspirations, the powers that be would forfeit their claim to moral authority. A new leadership would arise determined to do right, and the cycle would begin all over again.

So it was with the Idrissids, Morocco's first great dynasty. A descendant of the Prophet Mohammed's daughter Fatima, Idriss I fled Arabia for Morocco in AD 786 after discovering ambitious Caliph Haroun ar-Rashid's plan to murder his entire family. But Idriss didn't exactly keep a low profile. After being proclaimed an imam (religious leader) by the local Berbers, he unified much of northern Morocco in the name of Islam. Just a few days after he'd finally settled into his new capitol at Fez in 792, Haroun ar-Rashid's minions finally tracked down and poisoned Idriss I. Yet death only increased Idriss I's influence; his body was discovered to be miraculously intact five centuries later, and his tomb in the hillside town of Moulay Idriss (p268) remains one of the holiest pilgrimage sites in Morocco.

Queen Al-Kahina had one distinct advantage over the Umayyads: second sight. The downside? She foretold her own death at the hands of her enemy.

His son Idriss II escaped Haroun's assassins and extended Idrissid control across northern Morocco and well into Europe. In perhaps the first (but certainly not the last) approximation of democracy in Morocco, Idriss II's 13 sons shared power after their father's death. Together they expanded Idrissid principates into Spain and built the glorious mosques of Fez: the Kairaouine (p233) and the Andalous.

WARRIORS UNVEILED: THE ALMORAVIDS

With religious leaders and scholars to help regulate trade, northern Morocco began to take shape as an economic entity under the Idrissids. But the south was another story. A dissident prophet emerged near Salé brandishing a Berber version of the Quran, and established an apocryphal Islam called Barghawata that continued to be practised in the region for centuries. The military strongmen who were left in control of trading outposts in the Atlas Mountains and the Sahara demanded what they called 'alms' – bogus religious nomenclature that didn't fool anyone, and stirred up resentments among the faithful.

From this desert discontent arose the Sanhaja, the pious Saharan Berber tribe that founded the Almoravid dynasty. While the Idrissid princes were distracted by disputes over Spain and Mediterranean Morocco, the Sanhaja swept into the south of Morocco from what is today Senegal and Mauritania. Tough doesn't do justice to the Sanhaja; they lived on camels' meat and milk instead of bread, wore wool in the scorching desert and

788–829

Islam takes root in Morocco under Idriss I and Idriss II, who make Fez the epitome of Islamic art, architecture and scholarship and the capital of their Idrissid empire.

8th century

Through shared convictions and savvy alliances, Arab caliphates control an area that extends across the Mediterranean and well into Europe, just 320km shy of Paris.

1062

With the savvy Zeinab as his wife and chief counsel, Berber leader Yusuf ben Tachfin founds Marrakesh as a launching pad for Almoravid conquests of North Africa and Europe.

abstained from wine, music and multiple wives. Their manly habit of wearing dark veils is still practised today by the few remaining Tuareg, the legendary 'blue men' of the desert (and the many tourists who imitate them in camel-riding photo-ops). When these intimidating shrouded men rode into Shiite and Barghawata outposts under the command of Yahya ibn Umar and his brother Abu Bakr, they demolished brothels and musical instruments as well as their opponents.

After Yahya was killed and Abu Bakr was recalled to the Sahara to settle Sanhaja disputes in 1061, their cousin Youssef ben Tachfine was left to run military operations from a camp site that would become Marrakesh the magnificent. To spare his wife hardships of life in the Sahara, Abu Bakr divorced brilliant Berber beauty Zeinab and arranged her remarriage to his cousin. Though an odd romantic gesture by today's standards, it was an inspired match. Between ben Tachfine's initiative and Zeinab's strategic counsel, the Almoravids were unstoppable.

The Almoravids took awhile to warm up to their new capital – too many mountains and rival Berbers around, and too few palm trees. To make themselves more at home, the Almoravids built a mud wall around Marrakesh 5m high and 16km long, and set up the ingenious *khettara* underground irrigation system that still supports the Palmeraie, a vast palm grove outside of Marrakesh (now home away from home for celebrities including Paul McCartney and designer Jean-Paul Gaultier). The Jewish and Andalusian communities in Fez thrived under bin Tachfin, a soft-spoken diplomat and brilliant military strategist. His Spanish Muslim allies urged him to intercede against Christian and Muslim princes in Spain, complaining bitterly of extortion, attacks and debauchery. At the age of almost 80, bin Tachfin launched successful campaigns securing Almoravid control of Andalusia right up to the Barcelona city limits

'The Jewish and Andalusian communities in Fez thrived under bin Tachfin, a soft-spoken diplomat and brilliant military strategist.'

Youssef ben Tachfine was a tough act to follow. Ali was his son by a Christian woman, and he shared his father's commitments to prayer and urban planning. But while the reclusive young idealist Ali was diligently working wonders with architecture and irrigation in Marrakesh, a new force beyond the city walls was gathering the strength of an Atlas thunderstorm: the Almohads.

STICKS & STONES: THE ALMOHADS

Almohad historians would later fault Ali for two supposedly dangerous acts: leaving the women in charge and allowing Christians near drink. While the former was hardly a shortcoming – the mighty ben Tachfine prized his wife Zeinab's counsel – there may be some merit in the latter. While Ali was in seclusion praying and fasting, court and military officials were left to carry on, and carry on they did. Apparently, Almoravid Christian troops were all too conveniently stationed near the wine merchants of Marrakesh.

1069

The Almoravids take Fez by force and promptly begin remodelling the place, installing mills and lush gardens and cleaning up the city's act with running water and hammams.

1147

The Almohads finally defeat the Almoravids and destroy Marrakesh after a two-year siege, paving the way for Yacoub al-Mansour and his architects to outdo the Almoravids with an all-new Marrakesh.

1276

The winds of change blow in from the Atlas with the Zenata Berbers, who oust the Almohads and establish the Merenid dynasty with strategic military manoeuvres and even more strategic marriages.

None of this sat well with Mohammed ibn Tumart, the Almohad spiritual leader who'd earned a reputation in Meknès and Salé as a ninja-style religious vigilante, using his walking stick to shatter wine jars, smash musical instruments and smack men and women with the audacity to walk down the street together. Ibn Tumart finally got himself banished from Marrakesh in the 1120s for knocking Ali's royal sister off her horse with his stick. But though ibn Tumart died soon after, there was no keeping out the Almohads. They took over Fez after a nine-month siege in 1145, but reserved their righteous furore for Marrakesh two years later, razing the place to the ground and killing what was left of Ali's court (Ali died as he lived, quietly, in 1144). Their first projects included rebuilding the Koutoubia Mosque – which Almoravid architects, not up on their algebra, had misaligned with Mecca – and adding the soaring, sublime stone minaret that became the template for Andalusian Islamic architecture (see p233).

What ever happened to Barbary pirates, how did Islam mesh with Berber beliefs, and why was Morocco the exception to Ottoman rule? Jamil Abun-Nasr unravels these and other Moroccan mysteries in *A History of the Maghreb in the Islamic Period*.

A bloody power struggle ensued between the sons of ibn Tumart and the sons of his generals that wouldn't be settled definitively until 1185, when Abu Youssef Yacoub, the young son of the Muslim governor of Seville and Valencia, rode south into Morocco and drove his foes into the desert. But he also kept and expanded his power base in Spain, winning so many victories against the princes of Spain that he earned the moniker Al-Mansour, 'the victorious'. He modelled Seville's famous La Giralda after Marrakesh's Koutoubia minaret, and reinvented Marrakesh as an Almohad capital and learning centre to rival Fez. Yacoub's urban-planning prowess also made Fez arguably the most squeaky-clean city of medieval times, with 93 hammams, 47 soap factories and 785 mosques complete with ablutions facilities. Yacoub al-Mansour was also a patron of great thinkers, including Aristotle scholar Ibn Rashid – whose commentary would help spark a Renaissance among Italian philosophers – and Sufi master Sidi Bel-Abbes. Yacoub's enlightenment and admiration of architecture was apparently not all-encompassing; several synagogues were demolished under his rule.

Similar thinking (or lack thereof) prevailed in 12th-century Europe, where a hunt for heretics turned to officially sanctioned torture under the egregiously misnamed Pope Innocent IV. Bishop Bernard of Toledo, Spain, seized Toledo's mosque, and rallied Spain's Castilian Christian kings in a crusade against their Muslim rulers. The Almohads were in no condition to fight back. When Yacoub's 16-year-old son was named caliph, he wasn't up to the religious responsibilities that came with the title. He was obsessed with bullfighting, which was the PlayStation of the day, only considerably more dangerous; he was soon gored to death. Yacoub al-Mansour must've done pirouettes in his grave around 1230, when his next son tapped as caliph, al-Mamun, allied with his Christian persecutors and turned on his fellow Almohads in a desperate attempt to hang onto his father's empire. This short-lived caliph added the ultimate insult to Almohad injury when he climbed the Koutoubia *minbar* (pulpit)

1348

The bubonic plague strikes Mediterranean North Africa, and Merenid alliances and kingdoms crumble. Rule of law is left to survivors and opportunists to enforce, with predictably disastrous consequences.

1377

At Kairaouine University in Fez, Ibn Khaldun examines Middle Eastern history with scientific methods in his groundbreaking *Muqaddimah*, explaining how religious propaganda, taxation and revisionist history can make and break states.

1415

In search of gold and the fabled kingdom of Prester John – location of the Fountain of Youth, at the border of Paradise – Portuguese Prince Henry the Navigator begins his conquests of Moroccan seaports.

and announced that ibn Tumart wasn't a true Mahdi, or leader of the faithful. That title, he claimed, rightfully belonged to Jesus.

BY MARRIAGE OR MURDER: THE MERENIDS

When Zenata Berbers from the Anti Atlas invaded the Almohad capital of Marrakesh in 1269, the Almohad defeat was complete. The Zenata had already ousted the Almohads in Meknès, Salé, Fez and most of the Atlantic Coast. To win over religious types, they promised moral leadership under their new Merenid dynasty. Making good on the promise, the Merenids undertook construction of a *medersa* (school of religious learning) in every major city they conquered, levying special taxes on Christian and Jewish communities for the purpose. In exchange, they allowed these communities to practise key trades, and hired Christian mercenaries and Jewish policy advisors to help conduct the business of the Merenid state.

But this time the new rulers faced a tough crowd not easily convinced by promises of piety. Fez revolted, and the Castilian Christians held sway in Salé. To shore up their Spanish interests, the Merenids allied with the Castilian princes against the Muslim rulers of Granada. Once again, this proved not to be a winning strategy. By the 14th century, Muslim Spain was lost to the Christians, and the Strait of Gibraltar was forfeited. The Merenids also didn't expect the Spanish Inquisition, when over one million Muslims and Jews would be terrorised and forcibly expelled from Spain.

Without military might or religious right to back their imperial claims, the Merenids chose another time-tested method: marriage. In the 14th century, Merenid leaders cleverly co-opted their foes by marrying princesses from Granada and Tunis, and claimed Algiers, Tripoli and the strategic Mediterranean port of Ceuta. But the bonds of royal marriage were not rat-proof, and the Merenid empire was soon devastated by plague.

'Without military might or religious right to back their imperial claims, the Merenids chose another time-tested method: marriage.'

Abu Inan, son of the Merenid leader Abu Hassan, glimpsed opportunity in the Black Death, and proclaimed himself the new ruler despite one minor glitch: his father was still alive. Abu Hassan hurried back from Tripoli to wrest control from his treacherous son in Marrakesh, but to no avail. Abu Inan buried his father in the royal Merenid necropolis outside Rabat in 1351, but he too was laid to rest nearby after he was strangled by one of his own advisors in 1358.

The Merenids had an unfortunate knack for hiring homicidal bureaucrats. To cover his tracks, Abu Inan's killer went on a royal killing spree, until Merenid Abu Salim Ibrahim returned from Spain and terminally terminated this rampaging employee. Abu Salim's advisor sucked up to his boss by offering his sister in marriage, only to lop off Abu Salim's head after the wedding. He replaced Abu Salim with a Merenid patsy before thinking better of it and strangling the new sultan, too. This slippery advisor was assassinated by another Merenid, who was deposed a scant few

1498

Church Inquisitors present European Muslims and Jews with an unenviable choice: a) conversion and persecution or b) torture and death. Many choose c) none of the above, and escape to Morocco instead.

1525

Like a blast of scorching desert wind, the Beni Saad Berbers blow back European and Ottoman encroachment in Morocco, and establish a new Saadian dynasty in Marrakesh.

1549

Ahmed el-Mansour ed-Dahbi discovers Europe's sweet tooth, and makes a killing in the sugar trade – sometimes literally. With the proceeds, the Midas of Marrakesh gilds everything in sight.

years later by yet another Merenid – and so it continued for 40 years, with new Merenid rulers and advisors offing the incumbents every few years. While the Merenids were preoccupied with murderous office politics in Meknès and Fez, the Portuguese seized control of coastal Morocco.

VICTORY IS SWEET: THE SAADIANS

Much of Portugal (including Lisbon) had been under Muslim rule during the 12th century, and now the Portuguese were ready for payback – literally. The tiny, rugged kingdom needed steady supplies of food for its people and gold to fortify its growing empire, but Morocco stood in the way. No nation could wrest overland Saharan trade routes from the savvy Berber warriors who'd controlled key oases and mountain passes for centuries. Instead, the Portuguese went with tactics where they had clear technical advantages: naval warfare and advanced firearms. By systematically capturing Moroccan ports along the Mediterranean and Atlantic coasts, Portuguese gunships bypassed Berber middlemen inland, and headed directly to West Africa for gold and slaves.

'The Saadians satisfied European sugar cravings at prices that make today's oil and cocaine cartels look like rank amateurs.'

Once trade in the Sahara began to dry up, something had to be done. Entire inland communities were decimated, and formerly flush Marrakesh was wracked with famine. The Beni Saad Berbers – now known to history as the Saadians – from the desolate Drâa Valley took up the fight against the Portuguese. With successive wins against European, Berber and Ottoman rivals, the Saadians were able to reinstate inland trade. Soon the Saadians were in control of such sought-after commodities as gold, slaves, ivory, ostrich feathers and the must-have luxury for trendy European royals: sugar.

The Saadians satisfied European sugar cravings at prices that make today's oil and cocaine cartels look like rank amateurs. With threats of full-scale invasion, the Saadians had no problem scaring up customers and suppliers. The most dangerous sugar-dealer of all was Saadian Sultan Ahmed al-Mansour ed-Dahbi, who earned his names al-Mansour (the Victorious) for defeating foes from Portugal to the Sudan, and ed-Dahbi (the Golden) for his success in bilking them. This Marrakshi Midas used the proceeds to line the floor to ceiling of his Badi Palace (see p302) in Marrakesh with gold and gems. But after the sultan died, his short-lived successor stripped the palace down to its mudbrick foundations, as it remains today. The Saadian legacy is most visible in the Saadian Tombs (see p300), decked out for a decadent afterlife with painted Carrara marble and gold leaf. The Saadians died as they lived: dazzling beyond belief and a touch too rich for most tastes.

PIRATES & POLITICS: THE EARLY ALAWITES

The Saadian empire dissolved in the 17th century like a sugar cube in Moroccan mint tea, and civil war prevailed until the Alawites came along. With illustrious ancestors from the Prophet Mohammed's family and descendents extending to the current King Mohammed VI, the Alawites

1578

The Saadians fight both alongside and against Portugal at the infamous Battle of Three Kings, which ends with more than 8000 dead, a scant 100 survivors and the decimation of Portugal's ruling class.

1659–66

The Alawites end years of civil war, and even strike an uneasy peace with the Barbary pirates controlling Rabati ports

1684

Barbary pirates take English captives and England seizes Tangier, leading Morocco and England to argue over who stole what from whom first. The prisoners are released when England finally relinquishes Tangier – after destroying its port.

SUGAR & SALT: JEWISH MOROCCO

By the 1st century AD, Jewish Berber communities already well established in Morocco included farmers, metalworkers, dyers, glassblowers, bookbinders and cowboys. Jewish entrepreneurs excluded from trades and guilds in medieval Europe also took up crucial roles as dealers of the hottest Moroccan commodities of the time: salt and sugar. Jewish Moroccans were taxed when business went well for the ruling dynasty and sometimes blamed when it didn't, yet they managed to flourish even while European Jews faced escalating persecution.

Inquisition, forced conversions and summary executions were all the rage in Europe in the 14th to 16th centuries, and not surprisingly many European Jews fled to Morocco. Unlike European rulers, the comparatively tolerant Merenid and Saadian dynasties provided Jewish communities with some security, setting aside sections of Fez and Marrakesh as the first Jewish quarters, or *mellah*s – a name derived from the Arabic word for salt. This protection was repaid many times over in taxes levied on Jewish and Christian businesses, and the royally flush Saadians clearly got the sweet end of the deal. Yet several Jewish Moroccans rose to prominence as royal advisors, and in the Saadian Tombs of Marrakesh, trusted Jewish confidantes are buried even closer to the kings than royal wives.

By day, Jewish merchants traded alongside Christian and Muslim merchants, and were entrusted with precious salt, sugar and gold brought across the Sahara; by night they were under official guard in their quarters. Once the *mellahs* of Fez and Marrakesh became overcrowded with European arrivals, other notable *mellahs* were founded in Essaouira, Safi, Rabat and Meknès, and the traditions of skilled handicrafts that flourished there continue to this day. The influence of the *mellahs* spread throughout Morocco, especially in tangy dishes with the signature salted, pickled ingredients of Moroccan Jewish cuisine.

Under Alawite rule in the 17th to 19th centuries, the official policy toward Jewish Moroccans was one of give and take: on the one hand were opportunities as tradespeople, business leaders and ambassadors to England, Holland and Denmark in the 19th century; on the other were taxes, surveillance and periodic scapegoating. But in good times and bad, Jewish Moroccans remained a continuous presence. By 1948, some 250,000 to 300,000 Jewish Moroccans lived in Morocco. Many left after the founding of the states of Morocco and Israel, and today only an estimated 8000 to 10,000 remain, mostly in Casablanca. A Jewish community centre in Casablanca was a bombing target in 2003, and though no one was harmed at the community centre, the trade-centre blasts killed 33 and wounded 100. Yet the community remains intact, with a modest renaissance under the current king. Jewish schools now receive state funding; a few Jewish expatriates have responded to a royal invitation to return and are contributing to the revival of Essaouira's *mellah;* and like his Alawite predecessors, King Mohammed VI counts Jewish advisors among his confidantes.

were quite a change from the free-wheeling Saadians and their anarchic legacy. But many Moroccans might have preferred anarchy to the second Alawite ruler, the dreaded Moulay Ismail (1672–1727).

A despot whose idea of a good time included public disembowelments and amateur dentistry on courtiers who peeved him, Moulay Ismail was

1777

A century after the English leave Tangier a royal wreck, Morocco gets its revenge on the English, and becomes the first country to recognise the breakaway British colony calling itself the United States of America.

1830

France seizes the Algerian coast, increasing pressure on the Moroccan sultan to cede power in exchange for mafia-style protection along Morocco's coasts from the advancing Ottomans.

1860

If at first you don't succeed, try for seven centuries: Spain takes control of a swath of northern Morocco reaching into the Rif.

also a scholar, dad to hundreds of children and Mr Popularity among his royal European peers. European nobles gushed about lavish dinner parties at Moulay Ismail's palace in Meknès, built by conscripted Christian labourers. Rumour has it that when these decidedly nonunion construction workers finished the job, some were walled in alive. The European royal party tab wasn't cheap, either, but Moulay Ismail wasn't worried: piracy would cover it.

'European nobles gushed about lavish dinner parties at Moulay Ismail's palace in Meknès…'

Queen Elizabeth I kicked off the Atlantic pirate trade, allying against her arch-nemesis King Phillip II of Spain with the Saadians and specially licensed pirates known as privateers. The most notoriously effective hires were the Barbary pirates, Moriscos (Spanish Muslims) who'd been forcibly converted and persecuted in Spain and hence had an added motivation to shake down Spaniards. James I outlawed English privateering in 1603, but didn't seem to mind when his buddy Moulay Ismail aided and abetted the many British and Barbary pirates who harboured in the royal ports at Rabat and Salé – for a price. Business and tax revenues soared, and in the 17th century, Barbary pirates attacked Ireland, Wales, Iceland and even Newfoundland.

Barbary pirates also took prisoners, who were usually held for ransom and freed after a period of servitude – except for those who joined the pirates or the Moroccan government. Captives were generally better off with Barbary pirates than French profiteers, who typically forced prisoners to ply the oars of slave galleys until death. When the Portuguese were forced out of Essaouira in the 17th century, the city was rebuilt by European captives under the leadership of a French profiteer and a freed British prisoner who'd converted to Islam.

After Moulay Ismail's death, his elite force of 50,000 to 70,000 Abid, or 'Black Guard', ran amok, and not one of his many children was able to succeed him. The Alawite dynasty would struggle on until the 20th century, but the country often lapsed into lawlessness when rulers overstepped their bounds. Piracy and politics became key ways to get ahead in the 18th and 19th centuries – and the two were by no means mutually exclusive. By controlling key Moroccan seaports and playing European powers against one another, officials and outlaws alike found they could demand a cut of whatever goods were shipped through the Strait of Gibraltar and along the Atlantic Coast. In the late 18th century, when Sidi Mohammed ben Abdullah ended the officially condoned piracy of his predecessors and nixed shady side deals with foreign powers, the financial results were disastrous. With added troubles of plague and drought, Morocco's Straits were truly dire.

WITH FRIENDS LIKE THESE: EUROPEAN ENCROACHMENT

For all their successful European politicking, the early Alawites had apparently forgotten a cardinal rule of Moroccan diplomacy: never neglect

1880

France, Britain, Spain and the US meet in Madrid and agree among themselves that Morocco could retain nominal control over its territory – after granting themselves tax-free business licenses and duty-free shopping.

1906

The controversial Act of Algeciras divvies up North Africa among European powers like a *bastilla* pigeon pie, but Germany isn't invited to the feast – a slight that exacerbated tensions among European powers.

1912

The Treaty of Fès hands Morocco to the misnamed French Protectorate, which mostly protects French business interests at Moroccan taxpayer expense with the ruthless assistance of Berber warlord Pasha el-Glaoui.

Berber alliances. Sultan Moulay Hassan tried to rally support among the Berbers of the High Atlas in the late 19th century, but by then it was too late. France had taken an active interest in Morocco around 1830, and allied with Berbers across North Africa to fend off the Ottomans. After centuries of practise fighting Moroccans, Spain finally managed to occupy areas of northern Morocco in 1860 – and not incidentally, generated lasting resentment for desecrating graveyards, mosques and other sacred sites in Melilla and Tetouan. While wily Queen Victoria entertained Moroccan dignitaries and pressed for Moroccan legal reforms, her emissaries were busy brokering deals with France and Spain.

Order became increasingly difficult to maintain in Moroccan cities and in Berber mountain strongholds, and Moulay Hassan employed powerful Berber leaders to regain control – but accurately predicting Moulay Hassan's demise, some Berbers cut deals of their own with the Europeans. By the time Moulay Hassan's teenage successor Sultan Moulay Abdelaziz pushed through historic antidiscrimination laws to impress Morocco's erstwhile allies, the Europeans had reached an understanding: while reforms were nice and all, what they really wanted were cheap goods. By 1880, Europeans and Americans set up their own duty-free shop in Tangier, declaring it an 'international zone' where they were above the law and beyond tax collectors' reach.

But the lure of prime North African real estate proved irresistible. By 1906, Britain had snapped up strategic waterfront property in Egypt and the Suez; France took the prize for sheer acreage from Algeria to West Africa; Italy landed Libya; Spain drew the short stick with the unruly Rif and a whole lot of desert. Germany was incensed at being left out of this arrangement and announced support for Morocco's independence, further inflaming tensions between Germany and other European powers that would culminate in WWI.

In *The Conquest of Morocco*, Douglas Porch describes a controversial colonial war promoted as a 'civilising mission' and supported by business interests – an eerie echo of today's headlines, as Porch observes in the 2005 edition.

FRANCE OPENS A BRANCH OFFICE: THE PROTECTORATE

Whatever illusions of control Morocco's sultanate might've been clutching slipped away at the 1906 Conference of Algeciras, when control of Morocco's banks, customs and police force was handed over to France for 'protection'. The 1912 Treaty of Fès establishing Morocco as a French Protectorate made colonisation official, and the French hand-picked a new sultan with all the backbone of a sock puppet. More than 100,000 French administrators, outcasts and opportunists arrived in cities across Morocco to take up residence in French villes nouvelle (new cities).

Résident-Général Louis Lyautey saw to it that these new French suburbs were kitted out with all the mod cons: electricity, trains, roads and running water. Villes nouvelle were designed as worlds apart from adjacent Moroccan medinas (historic city centres), with French schools, churches, villas and grand boulevards named after French generals. No

1921–26

Under the command of Abd el-Krim, Berber leaders rebel against Spanish rule of the Rif, and Spain loses its foothold in the mountains.

1943–45

When the Allies struggle in Italy against the Axis powers, US General Patton calls in the Goums, Morocco's elite force of mountain warriors. With daggers and nighttime attacks, they overcome the Fascists and terrify unsuspecting Tuscans.

1942

In defiance of Vichy France, Casablanca hosts American forces staging the Allied North African campaign. This move eventually yields US support for Moroccan independence and the classic Humphrey Bogart film *Casablanca*.

expense or effort was spared to make the new arrivals feel right at home – which made their presence all the more galling for Moroccans footing the bill through taxes, shouldering most of the labour and still living in crowded, poorly serviced medinas. Lyautey had already set up French colonial enterprises in Vietnam, Madagascar and Algeria, so he arrived in Morocco with the confidence of a CEO and a clear plan of action: break up the Berbers, ally with the Spanish when needed and keep business running by any means necessary.

Impress Moroccans with your knowledge of the latest developments in Moroccan society, Amazigh culture, and North African politics, all covered in English at www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/homepage/default.

Once French-backed Sultan Yusuf died and his French-educated 18-year-old son Mohammed V became sultan, Lyautey expected that French business in Morocco would carry on as usual. He hadn't counted on a fiery young nationalist as sultan, or the staunch independence of ordinary Moroccans. Mining strikes and union organising interfered with France's most profitable colonial businesses, and military attention was diverted to force Moroccans back into the mines. Berbers had never accepted foreign dominion without a fight, and they were not about to make an exception for the French. By 1921 the Rif was up in arms against the Spanish and French under the leadership of Ibn Abd al-Krim al-Khattabi. It took five years, 300,000 Spanish and French forces and two budding Fascists (Francisco Franco and Marshal Pétain) to capture Ibn Abd al-Krim and force him into exile.

The French won a powerful ally when they named Berber warlord Thami el-Glaoui pasha of Marrakesh, but they also made a lot of enemies. The title gave the pasha implicit license to do as he pleased, which included mafia-style executions and extortion schemes, kidnapping women and children who struck his fancy, and friendly games of golf at his Royal Golf Club with Ike Eisenhower and Winston Churchill. The pasha forbade talk of independence under penalty of death, and conspired to exile Mohammed V from Morocco in 1953 – but as fate and perhaps karma would have it, Pasha Glaoui ended his days powerless, wracked with illness and grovelling on his knees for King Mohammed V's forgiveness.

Read first-hand accounts of Morocco's independence movement from Moroccan women who rebelled against colonial control, rallied and fought alongside men in Alison Baker's *Voice of Resistance: Oral Histories of Moroccan Women*.

A ROUGH START: AFTER INDEPENDENCE

Although the French Protectorate of Morocco was nominally an ally of Vichy France and Germany in WWII, independent-minded Casablanca provided ground support for the Allied North African campaign. So when Morocco's renegade Istiqlal (Independence) party demanded freedom from French rule in 1944, the US and Britain were finally inclined to agree. Under increasing pressure from Moroccans and the Allies, France allowed Mohammed V to return from exile in 1955. Morocco successfully negotiated its independence from France and Spain between 1956–58.

When Mohammed V died suddenly of heart failure in 1961, King Hassan II became the leader of the new nation. Faced with a shaky power base, an unstable economy and elections that revealed divides

1944–53

Moroccan nationalists demand independence from France with increasing impatience. Sultan Mohammed V is inclined to agree, and is exiled to Madagascar by the Protectorate for the unspeakable crime of independent thought.

1955–56

Morocco successfully negotiates its independence from France, Spain cedes control over most of its colonial claims within Morocco, and exiled nationalist Mohammed V returns as king of independent Morocco.

1961

When Mohammed V dies suddenly, young Hassan II becomes king. He transforms Morocco into a constitutional monarchy in 1962, but in 1965 ushers in the 'Years of Lead', dealing heavy punishments for dissent.

MARCHING TO THE KING'S TUNE

Talk of 'Greater Morocco' began idly enough in the 1950s, but in the 1970s it became the official explanation for Morocco's annexation of phosphate-rich Spanish Sahara. But there was a snag: the Popular Front for the Liberation of the Sahara and the Rio di Oro (Polisario – Saharawi pro-independence militia) declared the region independent. Putting his French legal training to work, Hassan II took up the matter with the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in the Hague in 1975, expecting the court would provide a resounding third-party endorsement for Morocco's claims. Instead the ICJ considered a counter-claim for independence from the Polisario, and dispatched a fact-finding mission to Spanish Sahara.

The ICJ concluded that the ties to Morocco weren't strong enough to support Moroccan sovereignty over the region, and the Western Sahara was entitled to self-determination. In a highly creative interpretation of this court judgment, Hassan II declared that Morocco had won its case and ordered a celebratory 'peace march' of more than 350,000 Moroccans from Marrakesh into Western Sahara in 1975 – some never to return. This unarmed 'Green March' underlined Morocco's regional presence, which was soon fortified by military personnel and land mines, and was vehemently resisted by armed Polisario fighters.

The Green March is no longer the symbol of national pride it once was in Morocco. The Green March murals that once defined café decor across southern Morocco have been painted over with trendier dunescapes and Amazigh pride symbols. Meanwhile, phosphate profits have dwindled, due to falling prices, mining sabotage and spiralling costs for Moroccan military operations, exceeding US$300 million annually by 1981. A truce was finally established in 1991 between Morocco and the Polisario, but Morocco's 2008 purchase of 24 F-26 fighter jets as part of a US$2.4 billion deal with US military contractors signals continuing regional tensions. UN efforts remain deadlocked, and the status of the Western Sahara is unresolved – a rallying cry for many Saharawi, and an awkward conversation nonstarter for many deeply ambivalent Moroccan taxpayers.

even among nationalists, Hassan II consolidated power by crackdowns on dissent and suspending parliament for a decade. With heavy borrowing to finance dam-building, urban development and an ever-expanding bureaucracy, Morocco was deep in debt by the 1970s. Attempts to assassinate the king underscored the need to do something, quickly, to turn things around – and then in 1973, the phosphate industry in the Spanish-controlled Western Sahara started to boom. Morocco staked its claim to the area and its lucrative phosphate reserves with the Green March (see boxed text, above), settling the area with Moroccans while greatly unsettling indigenous Saharawi people agitating for self-determination.

In Morocco's second parliamentary elections in 2007, 34 women were elected, representing 10.4% of all seats – that's just behind the US at 12.5% female representation after 110 elections.

RENOVATIONS IN PROGRESS: MOROCCO TODAY

With a growing gap between the rich and the poor and a mounting tax bill to cover Morocco's military debt from the Western Sahara, King Hassan II's suppression of dissent fuelled further resentment among his subjects. By the 1980s, the king's critics included journalists, trade

1975

The UN concludes that the Western Sahara is independent, but Hassan II concludes otherwise, ordering the Green March to enforce Morocco's claims to the region and its phosphate reserves.

1981

After the Casablanca Uprising, the military rounds up the usual suspects of dissenters and unionists nationwide. But demands for political reforms increase, and many political prisoners are later exonerated.

1999

Soon after taking the exceptional step of initiating a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to investigate abuses of power under his own rule, Hassan II dies. All hail Mohammed VI, and fresh hopes for a constitutional monarchy.

BROUHAHA IN THE BLOGOMA

Mobile phones chime in with the call to prayer, royal rose gardens are lined with internet kiosks, and cybercafé screens shield couples smooching via webcam: welcome to Morocco, home of techie trend-setters. Over the past decade, Moroccan women have become the most avid internet users in the Arab world, and with Morocco's youthful population obsessively texting one another, Moroccan mobile-phone usage soon rivalled Europe's. When Mohammed VI married computer engineer Salma Bennani in 2002, tech-savvy Moroccans rejoiced at the merger of modern monarchy and new technology. Soon after the happy event, the blogoma was born.

The Moroccan blogosphere (known by its pet nickname: Blogoma) now consists of hundreds of bloggers and online commentators posting on subjects ranging from cinema to neo-colonialism. After initially limiting access to YouTube, Google Earth, LiveJournal and Western Sahara sites, Morocco has eased up somewhat on online controls. Bloggers have found workarounds in any case, shifting screen names and locations for their commentary to stay clear of filters – whether parental or political. But in his early-adopter enthusiasm, one 26-year-old neglected the cardinal rule of Facebook: be careful what you post, for it will surely haunt you.

Taking his cue from the many satirical, faux-Facebook pages for George Bush and other public figures, Fouad Mourtada posted a fake page for Crown Prince Moulay Rachid of Morocco in February 2008, and promptly got himself arrested and sentenced to three years in prison. The blogoma immediately launched a protest site and an email campaign, and one month later a shaken, repentant Mourtada was released from prison with a royal pardon. Bloggers around the world briefly exulted in a flurry of cross-postings, and then turned their attention back to the usual subjects: movie spoilers, political scandals and Microsoft-bashing. To see what the blogoma is up to lately, visit the Moroccan Blog Aggregator at http://maroc-blogs.com.

unionists, women's rights activists, Marxists, Islamists, Berbers advocating recognition of their culture and language, and the working poor – in other words, a broad cross-section of Moroccan society.

The last straw for many came in 1981, when official Moroccan newspapers casually announced that the government had conceded to the International Monetary Fund to hike prices for staple foods. For the many Moroccans subsisting on the minimum wage, these increases meant that two-thirds of their income would be spent on a meagre diet of sardines, bread and tea. When trade unions organised protests of the measure, government reprisals were swift and brutal. Tanks rolled down the streets of Casablanca and hundreds were killed, at least 1000 wounded, and an estimated 5000 protesters arrested in a nationwide *laraf*, or roundup.

A Travellers History of North Africa by Barnaby Rogerson is a handy and accessible guide that puts Morocco into the wider currents of regional history.

Far from dissuading dissent, the Casablanca Uprising galvanised support for government reform. Sustained pressure from human-rights activists throughout the 1980s achieved unprecedented results in 1991, when Hassan II founded the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to investigate human-rights abuses that occurred during his own reign – a first for a king. In his very first public statement as king upon his

2002

Tensions with Spain flare over policing smuggling on the desert island in the Strait of Gibraltar known to Spanish as Perejil and Moroccans as Leila or Tura, compounding centuries-old sovereignty disputes over Ceuta and Melilla.

2002–04

Historic reforms initiated under Mohammed VI include regular parliamentary and municipal elections across Morocco, plus the Mudawanna legal code offering unprecedented protections for women.

2004–05

Morocco's Truth and Reconciliation Commission televises testimonies of the victims of Moroccan human-rights abuses during the 'Years of Lead', and the shows become the most watched in Moroccan TV history.

father's death in 1999, Mohammed VI vowed to right the wrongs of the era known to Moroccans as the Years of Lead.

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, when suspects were rounded up – many of whom, according to Human Rights Watch, were subjected to threats and abuse. But since that time, the commission has helped cement human-rights advances by awarding reparations to 9280 victims of the Years of Lead. The new parliament elected in 2002 set aside 30 seats for women members of parliament, and 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.

As Moroccans will surely tell you, there's still room for improvement. While Morocco's economic growth rate topped 6.5% for 2007, unemployment remains high, and a 2007 suicide bombing in a cybercafé in a working-class Casablanca suburb tragically underlined economic and cultural tensions. Municipal councils remain subject to Rabat's control, and the historically low 37% turnout in 2007 parliamentary elections have been construed by pundits as a lack of confidence in the pace of democratic reform. Most seats were won by the moderate Islamist Justice & Development Party (PJD) on a platform of improved government responsiveness. The state seems to be taking the critique on board, or at least lightening up. After cracking down on Morocco's most popular magazine *TelQuel* for reporting mild jokes about the royal family in August 2007, the state pardoned a blogger who subtly mocked the crown prince in April 2008 (see boxed text, opposite). While state reforms are in the works, Moroccans are taking the initiative to address poverty and illiteracy with enterprising projects from village associations and nonprofit organisations.

This is the state of modern Morocco today: home to rich and poor, old and new, deep contradictions and the courage to confront them. Tourism is flourishing in this nation of moderate climates and politics, and though tourism stretches available resources, it also helps support a middle class emerging between royalty and subsistence farmers. In new village self-help initiatives, the emerging Moroccan blogosphere and traditional free-form poetry, Moroccans are making their voices heard and staying true to their Berber roots as 'the free people'.

Global Voices Morocco provides a roundup of Moroccan news and opinion online, including English translations of bloggers' responses to Moroccan news at www.globalvoicesonline.org/-/world/middle-east-north-africa/morocco/.

Western Sahara Info at http://w-sahara.blogspot.com offers perspectives on the Western Sahara you won't find in officially sanctioned Moroccan newspapers, plus a plethora of live links to North African news sources.

The Moroccan Mirror offers frank, irreverent commentary about Moroccan democracy plus critical perspectives on international politics in English at http://almiraatblog.blogspot.com.

2004

Morocco signs free trade agreements with the EU and the US and gains status as a non-NATO ally. Morocco was turned down for EU membership in 1987, but special status is under consideration since 2006.

2006

Morocco proposes 'special autonomy' for the Western Sahara, and holds the first direct talks with Polisario in seven years – which end in a stalemate.

2007

The state bans Moroccan publication *Nichane* for a cover article called 'Jokes: How Moroccans Laugh at Religion, Sex and Politics', and an issue of Moroccan weekly *TelQuel* is pulped for 'failing to respect' the king.

The Culture

Forget for a moment the glossy travel brochures about Marrakesh, movies filmed in the Moroccan Sahara, urban legends about decadent Tangier: as anyone who's been there knows, the best way to get to know Morocco is through Moroccans. So to introduce you to Morocco, meet Fatima, Driss, Amina and Rashid, four characters who are composites of people you're likely to encounter on your travels. Each is representative of a segment of Moroccan society in some ways, and atypical in others; this chapter will describe how their experience maps onto Moroccan culture as a whole. Once you visit Morocco, you'll appreciate where these characters are coming from, and where they're headed in modern Morocco.

Meet Fatima

Fatima grew up working on a farm and making carpets for sale on the side just to put bread on the family table, but now she has a steady income collecting argan nuts at a Fair Trade women's cooperative near Agadir. The few times she's been into town, she was surprised how informal young people were towards their elders, though not offended – she thinks it's good for young people to think for themselves – and truly shocked by the prices. She lives frugally, saving every dirham to cover school fees for her five grandchildren. All her four children are married, and she always has stories and sweets for her grandchildren when they visit. Her arthritis is beginning to interfere with her work, though, and she worries about the family that now depends on her; her husband passed away a few years ago. She speaks Tashelhit (a Berber language) at home, can get by in Moroccan Arabic, and knows how to say 'hello' and 'welcome' in French and English to foreigners who sometimes visit the argan cooperative, but she doesn't read or write. Her dream is to make the pilgrimage to Mecca, *inshallah* (God willing).

In *Stolen Lives: Twenty Years in a Desert Jail,* Malika Oufkir describes her demotion from courtier to prisoner after her father's plot to assassinate Hassan II. The movie version is being filmed by Moroccan-French director Morjana Alaoui.

Meet Driss

Six days a week, Driss wakes at 6am to ride his scooter from his family's apartment in a new suburb of Marrakesh to the riad (courtyard house, converted into a guest house) where he works as assistant manager, dropping off his little sister at school on the way. He knows enough Spanish and English to explain the riad's breakfast menu to guests and speaks fluent Moroccan Arabic, French and classical Arabic (mostly from watching the news on Al-Jazeera) – though his native Berber language of Tashelhit is getting a little rusty. Driss's father owns a small *hanout* (corner grocery) and doesn't read or write that well himself, but insisted that Driss and his four siblings attend school. Driss takes a computer course on his weekly day off, and is saving up for a mobile phone. He knows his parents will start pressuring him to get married now that he's pushing 30, but he's in no rush and not especially interested in the village girls they have in mind. He'd rather have a girlfriend in the city first, and take things from there. He already has someone in mind, actually: she works at a cybercafé near the riad.

Meet Amina

Amina is a 22-year-old French-literature student, and she'd like to work in the Moroccan government – maybe even the foreign service. Her dad works for the state, and they live in a newer suburb of Rabat. Amina

hasn't been to France yet, but a couple of her relatives who live there are financing her education. They keep in touch through email in French and Moroccan Arabic, and she keeps up on world news in French, Arabic and English through the internet and watching satellite TV with her cousins. On weekends, she often goes to restaurants with friends as one big group. She doesn't drink alcohol personally, but some people she knows do, and she doesn't judge them for it. As far as dating goes, she met a guy in an internet chat room a while back, but that was nothing serious. She hasn't yet met anyone she'd consider chatting with via webcam, though some of her friends do. She's not ready to settle down yet – there's too much else to do first.

Meet Rashid

Rashid's sisters tease him that he's such a dreamer, he always lets the goats get away. They used to walk 4km each way to school together, but last year's drought hit his Middle Atlas village hard. His family had to sell their donkey, and make tough choices about who they could spare this harvest season. Eleven-year-old Rashid is a better student and worse goatherd than his sisters, so he gets to go to school – for now, anyway. He likes to surprise his sisters by bringing something home from school: a lazy lizard, beans from the school garden, and one time, a foreign trekker for tea. His family served their best bread and butter, and though no one understood a word the guy was saying, he wasn't bad at *koura* (football). The postcard the trekker sent through the village association is on the family-room shelf, and Rashid is sure that if he can go to the regional middle school, one day he'll write back in perfect English.

To help keep kids in school, make purchases only from adults, and don't give children money, pens or sweets – it encourages them to skip school and hassle tourists.

LIFESTYLE

Family Values

As different as they may seem, Fatima, Driss, Amina and Rashid have one thing in common: a profound attachment to family. While they each have careers and ideas of their own, their aspirations and ambitions are tied in some way to family – which makes them each quintessentially Moroccan.

MOROCCAN SOCIAL GRACES

Many visitors are surprised at how quickly friendships can be formed in Morocco, and often a little suspicious. True, carpet sellers aren't necessarily after your friendship when they offer you tea, and an unexpected introduction to your new Moroccan friend's single cousin can be awkward. If you find yourself in these situations, just claim an obligation elsewhere, smile, and leave – no hard feelings.

But notice how Moroccans behave with one another, and you'll see that friendly overtures are more than a mere contrivance. People you meet only in passing are likely to remember you and greet you warmly the next day, and it's considered polite to stop and ask how they're doing. Greetings among friends can last 10 minutes in Morocco, as each person enquires after the other's happiness, well-being and family. To make friends in Morocco, shake hands and then touch your heart with your right hand, which shows you're taking the meeting to heart. Good friends tack up to four air kisses on after a handshake.

Moroccans are generous with their time, and extend courtesies that might seem to you like impositions, from walking you to your next destination to inviting you home for lunch. (At the risk of stating the obvious, anyone who suddenly demands payment for services rendered is not your friend). To show your appreciation, stop by the next day to say hello, and be sure to compliment the cook (see p88).

With the possible exception of the royal family (see Economy, p52), status is gained in Morocco not so much by displaying wealth or privilege but from sharing it with family. Even major status symbols (like Driss' motor scooter and the satellite TV at Amina's house) are valued less as prized possessions than as commodities benefiting the family as a whole. This is beginning to change, as the emerging middle class Driss represents moves out of large family homes and into smaller apartments in the suburbs, where common property is not such a given. But family connections remain paramount in Morocco, and remittances from Moroccans living abroad are essential to family back home.

Catch Moroccan Arabic jokes you might otherwise miss with *Humour and Moroccan Culture*, a treasury of Moroccan wit in translation collected by American expat Mathew Helmke.

Since family is a focal point for Moroccans, expect related questions to come up in the course of conversation: where is your family? Are you married, and do you have children? How are they doing? This might seem a little nosey, and a roundabout way of finding out who you are and what interests you. But to Moroccans, questions about where you work or what you do in your spare time are odd ice-breakers, since what you do for a living or a hobby says less about you than what you do for your family.

Education

Next to family, education is the most important indicator of social status in Morocco. Driss and Amina read and write, like 55.3% of Morocco's urban population. While Driss is like most Moroccan men in this respect, Amina is in the minority of Moroccan women, 60% of whom were illiterate as of 2003. But even with her college degree, Amina may find her employment options limited: 40% of Moroccan humanities graduates were unemployed in 2008.

At rural girls' school Dar Taliba, 14-year-old students have assisted international ethnobotanists in compiling the most thorough catalogue of Berber medicinal plants and their uses in North Africa.

Rashid's ability to read makes him an exception in rural Morocco, where illiteracy still tops 70% – and if he does enrol in middle school, he will be among just 12% of rural boys to have that opportunity. Like Rashid's sisters, Moroccan girls account for almost two-thirds of the half-million Moroccan kids under 15 who work instead of getting an education. Schooling to age 14 is now an official mandate, and positive social pressure and local initiatives have dramatically improved opportunities for education in the Moroccan countryside. But for vulnerable rural families like Rashid's, just getting the children fed can be difficult, let alone getting them to school. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, child malnourishment is on the rise in Morocco, doubling from 4% in the mid-1990s to 8% in 2006. Innovative school programs like Rashid's that provide food as well as literacy are much needed to build a healthier, brighter future for Morocco.

Social Norms

Explore the world of Moroccan haute couture online at http://marocfashion.canalblog.com (in French) with photos of models working chic belted caftans and gauzy *gandouras* (gowns).

As you will probably notice in your travels through Morocco, behaviour that is considered unacceptable outdoors, in full public view – such as drinking alcohol, or making kissy faces at someone of the opposite sex – is often tolerated in the relative privacy of a restaurant terrace, riad, or internet café. In this context, Amina's views on drinking and internet dating are not so radical, and Driss may stand a chance with his cybercafé cutie. While there are still laws in Morocco restricting sale of alcohol in view of a mosque, sex outside of marriage and homosexuality, enforcement of these laws is very rare. With proper discretion, there is generally plenty of latitude when it comes to socially acceptable behaviour.

VISITORS: DRESS TO IMPRESS

Since they've had contact with Europeans for the last couple of millennia and satellite TV for a decade, Moroccans are not likely to be shocked by Western attire. If you pull a Lawrence of Arabia and don robes and headgear, you'll get puzzled stares in Morocco, and possibly a smirk or two. This is not Saudi Arabia, and who wears a scimitar to work anymore? A head-covering is handy protection against sandstorms in the desert, but nobody expects you to wear a headscarf or Tuareg blue turban – and these days, even Tuaregs wear Adidas.

That said, your choice of attire still may be perceived as a sign of respect (or lack thereof) for yourself, your family and your hosts. Mostly likely no one will say anything to you if your clothing is on the skimpy side – but in this sociable society, nothing indicates disapproval like the cold shoulder. Some people will be embarrassed for you and the family that raised you, and either give you pitying glances or avoid eye contact altogether. So if you don't want to miss out on some excellent company – especially among older Moroccans – do make a point of dressing modestly.

For men and women alike, this means not wearing shorts and sleeveless tops. Even in trendy nightclubs, clingy clothing, short skirts, and low-cut and midriff tops could be construed as, ahem, the oldest kind of professional attire. Anything you could wear to the supermarket back home without attracting attention should do, taking into consideration the local climate, which can range from desert-scorching to mountain-chilly.

Fashion, Moroccan Style

Many Moroccan men and women wear the jellaba, an ankle-length robe with a pointy hood and silk buttons down the front. It's roomy, cosy and intended to be modest, though some of the leopard-print and hypnotic-swirl jellabas women wear may strike you as more eye-catching than a miniskirt. Many younger Moroccans mix up their wardrobe: urbanites like Amina and Driss might pair a chic hip-length tunic or buttoned shirt with jeans or ankle-length pants and Moroccan *babouches* (slippers) or trendy shoes. Logo T-shirts and trainers are all the rage – if copyright were enforced here, the populations of major Moroccan cities would be half naked.

Head coverings are not nearly such a fixation in Morocco as they are in France, where laws attempt to regulate where women can and can't wear them. Some Moroccan women wear the *hijab* (headscarf) for religious or cultural reasons, and some don't, depending on the locale and the individual woman. Women in Casablanca are more likely to wear headscarves (colour-coordinated with their outfits, naturally) than Marrakshiyyas (women from Marrakesh). A full face-covering veil is unusual in cities, and even rarer for rural women working in the fields. Young women like Amina often choose not to wear a headscarf at all, try it for a while to see if it suits them, or alternate, wearing a head covering in the streets but taking it off at home and work.

Keep tabs on the welfare of Morocco's street children and find out what you can do to help at http://gvnet.com/streetchildren/Morocco.htm, an information clearing house on at-risk youth.

ECONOMY

Economic Status

Fatima, Driss and Amina would be considered fortunate in Morocco, where the World Bank cites 19% of the population living below the poverty line and unemployment tops 13%. Although the national economy grew at an impressive rate of 5.8% in 2007, 7% of the population still makes less than US$1 a day and the average annual income is US$1677. The hospitality Rashid's family offer their visitor is especially generous, considering most rural Moroccans are working hard just to put food on the table. Bread and butter may not seem like a lavish meal to you, but

35% of the average Moroccan income is spent to cover basic foodstuffs. Only 10% of Moroccans have the means to buy imported foods at the supermarket, let alone eat at restaurants like Amina.

While the gap between rich and poor is growing in Morocco, a new middle class is emerging. Driss and Fatima belong to this class, even though they almost certainly make less in a day than you do in an hour. Still, the economic class that's head, shoulders and tiaras above all others is the Moroccan royal family, whose wealth was estimated by a (now-estranged) royal family member at between US$4 billion and US$20 billion. In response, an officially sanctioned Moroccan magazine published the king's salary: about US$45,000 a month, described as 'less than a Western CEO's salary' – not including expenses like US$190,000 per month spent on tune-ups for the royal car collection.

Products & Prospects

Driss, Amina and Fatima's incomes come from foreign trade, tourism, remittances from relatives living abroad, and hard work – fairly representative for the country as a whole. Your visit to Morocco makes a positive impact on all of their career prospects, but especially Rashid's. The UN estimates that for every for every eight to 10 tourists who visit an urban area, one job is created locally, and in rural areas those tourists represent six or seven essential new job opportunities.

With a boost from tourism and a growing Moroccan middle class, services are now the fastest-growing sector of the Moroccan economy at 56% of GDP in 2005. Another estimated 17% of GDP comes from industry, mostly from textiles, food processing, and phosphate mining in the Western Sahara (see Marching to the King's Tune, p45). Agriculture and forestry account for 12% to 20% of GDP, depending on the harvest, and 40% of the country's workforce. Fishing is not the pivotal industry it once was, with low fish stocks in the Mediterranean. Hashish is still a key cash crop in Morocco, though periodic police crackdowns have made it more of a high-risk, export-only product.

Morocco is the world's number two producer of cannabis, behind the US. So who's buying? At 60% markup, the UK spends £5 billion annually on kif.

Social security is provided by the family in Morocco, not the government, and workers' compensation and private-sector pensions are nonexistent. But with pressure from activists and unions, some industries are establishing regulations and licensing to ensure workers' well-being. Working conditions are under increased public scrutiny since 2008, when fires in a Casablanca mattress factory killed 55 workers who were allegedly locked inside by management.

Creative Conservation

So what does the economic future hold for our Moroccan friends, beyond farming and tourism? In short: sun, wind and dung. Drilling oil off the coast of the Western Sahara has proved expensive and environmentally messy, and Morocco is now turning towards more reliable energy sources for its own use and for export. The pioneering nation is already harnessing wind power in the Rif, and has partnered with British Petroleum to explore solar energy near Marrakesh. Morocco is the world's largest exporter of what is referred to as 'crude fertiliser', and redirecting resources towards intensive animal-dung collection could mean a shift away from dangerous mining and processing of phosphates into chemical fertiliser – not to mention a whole new meaning for the term 'gross national product'.

The water situation is less promising. Due to the demands of city dwellers and tourist complexes, Moroccan water reserves are at a historic

low, and existing water is already being redirected away from subsistence farmers like Rashid's family in the Atlas. According to the Centre for Environmental Systems Research, Morocco is now under severe water stress, and per capita water availability for Moroccans is less than half World Health Organization–recommended levels. With splashy inland water parks and golf courses draining water resources and 17 large coastal resort developments in the works, Morocco is now having to rethink its resource-intensive tourism strategy.

But here Morocco is in a fortunate position: to envision a more sustainable future, it can look to its recent past. Ancient *khettara* irrigation systems, still in use, transport water from natural springs to fields and gardens in underground channels, without losing precious water to evaporation. Although certification is still a novel concept, most small-scale Moroccan farming practices are organic by default, since chemical fertilizers are costly and donkey dung pretty much comes with the territory. Community hammams use power and water for steamy saunas more efficiently than individual showers or baths. Locally made, detergent-free *savon noir* ('black soap' made from natural palm and olive oils) is gentle enough for a hammam or shave, and effective as laundry soap and household cleaner, without polluting run-off. The leftover 'grey water' can be used for gardens and courtyard fountains. There's more to Morocco's traditional courtyard architecture than just its dashing good looks, too. The metre-thick mudbrick walls provide

BUYING SUSTAINABLE SOUVENIRS

- **Most sustainable: tyre crafts** Used tyres don't biodegrade, and burning them produces toxic fumes – but, cleverly repurposed by Moroccan artisans, they make fabulous home furnishings. Tyre-tread mirrors make any entryway look dashingly well-travelled, and inner-tube tea trays are ideal for entertaining motorcycle gangs. For the best selection, visit the tyre-craft *mâalems* lining the south end of Rue Riad Zitoun el-Kedim in Marrakesh (p321).
- **Quite sustainable: argan oil** The finest cosmetic oil to ever pass through the business end of a goat – no, really. Outside Essaouira, goats climb low argan trees to eat the nuts, digesting the soft, fuzzy outer layer and passing the pit. Traditionally, women then collect the dung, extract and clean the pit, crack it to remove the nut, and press the nut to yield a tiny quantity of the orange-tinted, vitamin-E-rich oil. This is arduous handwork, and buying from a collective is the best way to ensure that the women are paid fairly and no additives are included in the end product (no pun intended). Check out **Cooperative Amal** (p165) north of Agadir, **Cooperative Tiguemine** (p166) outside Essaouira, or **Assouss Cooperative d'Argane** (p322) at their retail outlet in Marrakesh.
- **Possibly sustainable: Berber carpets and blankets** Berber blankets are your best bet, made with wool so all-natural that you can feel the lanolin on them. Despite claims to use only vegetable dyes, most carpet weavers use a combination of natural and artificial dyes to achieve the desired brilliance and lightfastness. Some cooperatives card and dye their own wool for natural colours (mostly browns, yellows and pale greens), but for bright colours it's better that they source their wool from reputable industrial dyers instead of handling chemical dyes and pouring used dye down drains. Check out Middle Atlas weaving cooperatives such as **Kasbah Myriem** (p275) and **Atelier du Tissages de l'Association du Zaouiat Ahsal** (p331).
- **Not so sustainable: thuyya wood** The root of a juniper that grows only in Morocco, this caramel-coloured knotty burl is at risk of being admired to extinction. Buy carved thuyya bowls and jewellery boxes only from artisans' collectives more likely to practice responsible collection and reforesting, such as the **Cooperative Artisanal des Marqueteurs** (p164) and the **Cooperative Artisanale Femmes de Marrakesh** (p321).

natural insulation against heat in summer and chill in winter, eliminate most street noise, and don't trap humidity like concrete so that you can literally breathe easier.

Morocco is also thinking fast on its feet, becoming an early adopter of resource-saving new technologies. Solar water heaters provide hot water instantly for showers in the afternoon and evening, saving water that might otherwise be wasted by running the tap while gas heaters warm up. Small, salt-filtered plunge pools offer a quick way to cool down without the need for air-conditioning or Olympic-size, chlorine-laced pools. Add these new and traditional resource-saving practices together, and you'll see why Morocco is poised not only to make the switch to sustainable tourism, but to show Europe how it's done. To do your part to promote responsible travel, check out the Greendex (p1) and Buying Sustainable Souvenirs (p53).

POPULATION

For a millennia-old civilisation, Morocco looks young. There's a reason for this, beyond all those rejuvenating hammams: 55% of the population is under 25, and almost a third of Morocco's population is under 15. Back in 1971, when Moroccan child-mortality rates were high and life expectancy low, Moroccan women had an average of 7.8 children. But with improved health care and young Moroccans like Driss and Amina delaying marriage for careers and dating, Morocco's baby boom is winding down. The average number of births per woman is now 2.7, and population growth has dipped below 1.6%. Less than 5% of Morocco's population of almost 33 million is over 65, and most of these are women – often, working widows like Fatima.

Médecins Sans Frontières (www.doctorswithoutborders.org) and Amnesty International (www.amnesty.org) provide essential aid to Moroccan migrants stranded between borders without family, funds or legal protection.

Like many Moroccans born and raised in rural villages, 11-year-old Rashid probably won't be able to stay home much longer. Since 55% of rural Moroccan families struggle to meet subsistence-level needs, rural teens often must move to larger towns and cities to find work and educational opportunities.

Most Moroccans you'll meet are of Berber-Arab origin, but you'll also probably interact with some of Morocco's 100,000-plus foreign residents. The majority are French, and many work in the tourism trade – especially in Marrakesh, Morocco's number-one tourism destination.

Emigration & Immigration

You've probably read about Moroccans swimming across the Strait of Gibraltar to seek agricultural work in Spain (see A Brisk Trade in Dreams, opposite), but that's not even half the story of migration in Morocco. With most of Morocco's population now hitting puberty, competition is fierce for coveted spots in Morocco's state-supported universities. Those who succeed face limited opportunities after graduation, given 2008 nationwide unemployment rates approaching 34% for urban Moroccans aged 15 to 34.With limited state resources to remedy this situation, Moroccans like Amina are turning to family for help. Moroccan residents and naturalised citizens in France, Germany, Spain and the US – whose combined remittances to family back home represent as much as 20% of GDP – are increasingly sponsoring family members to pursue studies and careers abroad.

Émigrés, Expats and Internationals

The growing numbers of Moroccan emigrants returning to Morocco to live, retire or start businesses are becoming an upper-middle economic

A BRISK TRADE IN DREAMS

Uninhabited islands off the coast of Morocco have long been used as ports for cocaine en route from South America to Europe and international trade in Moroccan hashish, especially Spanish-administered islands Ceuta, Melilla and Isla del Perejil (aka Leila). Now smugglers are earning as much or more promising to lead undocumented immigrants along these stepping stones to Europe – though many don't quite deliver on their promises. Migrants are often expected to swim for miles through the treacherous waters, or are simply abandoned in the Strait. With funding from Spain and the EU, Ceuta and Melilla have recently constructed razor-wire barriers at a combined cost of about €338 million, but smuggling continues.

Such as they are, smugglers' services are generally priced at anywhere between €300 to €3500 – which is as much as three years' income for the average Moroccan – but the human costs are considerably higher. According to recent human-rights reports, over a five-year period as many as 4000 North African migrants have died in their attempts to reach Spanish shores. But given daunting unemployment rates, limited educational opportunities and the need to support their families, many Moroccans continue to take the risk, convinced that all they have left to lose is their lives.

class of their own, since their euros and dollars have considerably more buying power than nontransferable dirhams. The carefree spending of Moroccan emigrants is a source of both revenue and resentment for Moroccans, who grumble openly about returnees driving up costs and importing a culture of conspicuous consumption that's unattainable and shallow.

Morocco hosted over seven million visitors in 2007 – that's about one visitor for every five Moroccans, up from 2.5 million in 2002 – but it hadn't counted on quite so many staying. To many Moroccans who remember the hard-fought Independence movement, international chain resorts and European holiday apartment complexes along the Atlantic coast bring to mind colonial French-only villes nouvelles (see France Opens a Branch Office, p43). Swimming pools, air-conditioning and green lawns strain scarce local water and energy resources, making most tourist complexes a very mixed blessing.

Farida ben Lyzaid's film *A Door to the Sky* tells the story of an émigré's return to Morocco, and her delicate balancing act between activism and tradition.

Meanwhile, the European rage for buying riads (traditonal courtyard houses) has spread from Marrakesh to medinas (old cities) across Morocco, pricing Moroccans out of the market for homes in their hometowns. As Moroccans move to the peripheries, suburban sprawl and traffic has increased, and historic medina neighbourhoods can seem strangely empty and lifeless off-season. To make foreign-owned real-estate investments still more complicated, European and American expatriates living and working in Morocco often earn income in euros and pay expenses in dirhams, giving them a competitive advantage over local businesses – and many stand accused of not paying fair wages and taxes.

But as expat riad-owners are quick to point out, there is a flipside to this real-estate equation. Increased foreign investment can create employment opportunities in the growing tourism sector, help preserve historic homes, generate increased appreciation and demand for local artisanship, and provide Moroccans with the contacts and hard currency needed to start their own businesses. Additional taxes were levied on guest houses in 2008, and with increased competition for talented multilingual employees, riad-owners are beginning to offer better salaries, employee health benefits, and weekends off to retain employees. Lonely Planet recommends licensed riad guest houses that provide fair

pay and working conditions to employees and promote positive cultural exchange; you can help by sharing feedback from your experience at talk2us@lonelyplanet.com.

In Morocco, cultural differences are not insurmountable – witness the many intercultural married couples you'll meet running riads, restaurants and other businesses in Morocco. In response to claims that their mere presence is changing the local culture, some expats and internationals point to the satellite dishes on their neighbours' houses, and claim that globalisation is inevitable. Maybe, but travellers can make the exchange more equitable by making an effort to venture beyond their hotels to explore Moroccan culture and meet Moroccans on their home turf.

WOMEN IN MOROCCO

Nineteenth-century Swiss adventurer Isabelle Eberhardt dressed as a Berber man, became a Sufi, smoked kif, operated as a triple agent, married an Algerian dissident and wrote her memoir *The Oblivion Seekers* – all before 30.

A generation or two ago, you might not have had a chance to meet Fatima or Amina. Most of the people you'd see out and about, going to school, socialising and conducting business in the souqs would have been men. But while the public sphere was mostly a male domain, the private sphere belonged to women. Women have long been the backbone of Moroccan households – and, traditionally, performed most of the back-breaking domestic labour. In poorer rural households, women typically had the burden of animal husbandry and tending crops in addition to child care, cooking, cleaning, and fetching water and kindling. In well-to-do urban households, girls as young as 10 were hired as indentured servants, isolated from their families and receiving little more than a place to sleep for their efforts. A woman had no guarantee of support after marriage, either: women abandoned by their husbands could lose their homes to their husband's family, and be left to fend for themselves and their children.

But thanks to the bold efforts made by many pioneering Moroccans, women such as Fatima and Amina now have choices open to them unthinkable just a generation or two ago. As of 2004, Morocco's Mudawanna legal code guarantees women crucial rights to custody, divorce, property ownership and child support, among other protections. Positive social pressure has nearly eradicated the practice of hiring girls under 14 years of age as domestic workers, and initiatives to eliminate illiteracy are giving girls a considerably better start in life. Women have asserted their rights in the workplace, too, joining industrial unions and forming agricultural and artisans' collectives. More than 10% of the winners in Morocco's second parliamentary elections in 2007 were women, and women have been elected to municipal offices across the country.

Best selling Moroccan author and academic Fatima Mernissi exposes telling differences and uncanny similarities in ideals of women in Europe and the Middle East in *Scheherazade Goes West: Different Cultures, Different Harems*.

The modern Moroccan woman's outlook extends far beyond her front door, especially for urban and middle-class women with access to satellite TV, mobile phones and the internet. Women visitors may meet urban Moroccan women eager to chat, and compare life experiences and perspectives on world events. Men visiting Morocco have less opportunity to befriend Moroccan women, since male–female interactions are still somewhat stifled by social convention. But despite customs that typically limit male–female interactions to large group outings, you'll surely notice some jittery internet daters meeting in parks, at cafés and via webcam. Moroccan women are on the move and making their presence known, whipping past on their motor scooters, tunics and headscarves billowing in the breeze, and taking over sidewalks on arm-in-arm evening strolls.

RELIGION

Like nearly 99% of Moroccans today, Driss, Fatima, Amina and Rashid are Muslim. Christian and Jewish communities have been established in Morocco for 1700 years or more, but in recent years their numbers have dwindled. Along with a few Protestants and Hindus, there are about 23,000 Catholics and 65 Catholic priests in the country, mostly in major urban centres. Emigration to France, Israel and the US has reduced Morocco's once-robust Jewish community to about 7000, and the Jewish communities that once inhabited the historic *mellahs* (Jewish quarters) of Fez, Marrakesh, Safi, Essaouira and Meknès have relocated to Casablanca. (For more on this subject, see Sugar and Salt: Jewish Morocco, p41).

About Islam

Soaring minarets, shimmering mosaics, intricate calligraphy, the muezzin's mesmerising call to prayer: much of what thrills visitors in Morocco today is inspired by Moroccans' deep and abiding faith in Islam. It all began in AD 610, when a middle-aged merchant from Mecca named Mohammed began to receive revelations that there was one God, and that believers shared a common responsibility to submit to God's will. Based on the teachings of the Old and New Testaments, this new religion would be built on five pillars: *shahada*, the affirmation of faith in God and God's word entrusted to the Prophet Mohammed; *salat*, or prayer, ideally performed five times daily; *zakat* or charity, a moral obligation to give to those in need; *sawm*, the daytime fasting practised during the month of Ramadan; and *haj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca that is the culmination of lifelong faith for Muslims.

To avoid conflict, French Général Lyautey banned non-Muslims from mosques in Morocco. Moroccans appreciated the privacy so much that they ousted the French from Morocco, and kept the ban.

While all Muslims agree on these basic tenets received by the Prophet Mohammed, some doctrinal disagreements ensued after his death. The Umayyads challenged his son-in-law Ali's claim to the title of caliph, or leader of the faithful. Despite the Umayyads' considerable conviction and military might, some Muslims continued to recognise only successors of Ali; today they are known as Shiites. But in sheer numbers of followers, the Umayyad caliphate's Sunni Muslim practice is more mainstream today.

ISLAM IN MOROCCO

Like many Muslim countries, Morocco is mostly Sunni. There are four main schools of thought among the Sunnis emphasising different aspects of doctrine, and today the one most commonly followed in Morocco is the Maliki school. Historically this school has been less strict, with Maliki *qaids* (judges) applying the sharia, or religious code, according to local custom instead of absolutist rule of law.

During Ramadan, believers are expected to abstain from sex, and nothing should pass their lips from sunup to sundown.

One local tradition to emerge over centuries of Islamic practice in Morocco is the custom of venerating *marabouts,* or saints. *Marabouts* are devout Muslims whose acts of devotion and professions of faith were so profound, their very presence is considered to confer *baraka*, or grace, even after their death. Moroccans go out of their way to visit *marabouts*' tombs and *zawiyas* (shrines) – and many claim that for the faithful, the right *zawiya* can fix anything from a broken heart to arthritis.

This practice of honouring *marabouts* is more in line with ancient Berber beliefs and Sufi mysticism than orthodox Islam, which generally discourages anything resembling idol worship. Visits to *zawiyas* are side trips for the many devout Moroccans who – like Fatima – spend a lifetime preparing and planning for the *haj*. Moroccans do not necessarily see a conflict between *baraka* and belief, or local customs and universal understanding.

SPORT

Football

If it's a rousing game of *koura* (football, aka soccer) you're after, you won't have to look far: you'll find a football skidding across virtually every patch of *piste* (hard-packed dirt) in Morocco. Opportunities for a game abound in rural areas like Rashid's village and in urban parks, but mind the cactus – and don't get too cocky if you're assigned to guard a scrawny preteen like Rashid. You're in for a workout, if not public humiliation.

If you prefer other people to do the kicking for you, you'll find plenty of company among fellow football fans in 320 stadiums across Morocco. A ticket will only set you back a few dirhams, so you can invest in the roasted pumpkin and sunflower seeds that hyped-up fans chomp throughout the game. Offer some to your neighbour, and maybe your new friend will explain to you what people are yelling at the referee. Probably it's *'Seer al muk!'* – loosely translatable as 'How can you face your mother?!'

Football-fan behaviour in Morocco is generally more genteel than in, ahem, England, though it always helps if you're rooting for the same team as the people sitting next to you. Usually this is Morocco's own 'Lions of the Atlas', who often make it to the World Cup qualifiers – otherwise, it's any team but Tunisia, Morocco's archrival. Local teams to watch include Marrakesh's Kawkab, Raja Casablanca, MAS Fez and Rabat's Fath. Star players on these teams often get recruited for the national team (the Lions) and sometimes for teams in France, Spain and Germany.

THE TOUGHEST FOOT RACE ON EARTH *Brendan Sainsbury*

The steep Saharan dunes rose like ghostly sentinels out of the shimmering desert mirage. Instinctively, I readjusted my backpack, took a quick sip of insipid electrolyte drink and floundered towards them like a punch-drunk boxer struggling to stay lucid.

It was 48°C, I hadn't showered or eaten properly in five days, and the blisters on my feet were starting to look like hideously deformed golf balls. For close on 100 miles I had half-run, half-staggered across a back-breaking mix of barren moonscapes, vertiginous mountains and arid salt flats. Rather forebodingly, I still had another 50 to go.

It was March 2008 and I was taking part in the legendary Marathon des Sables, a 150-mile, seven-day pain fest across the scorching deserts of Southern Morocco, popularly considered by ultra-athletes to be 'the toughest footrace on earth'. Dreamt up by pioneering Frenchman, Patrick Bauer, in 1986, the route takes gung-ho participants through some of the most breathtaking and brutal landscapes on the planet in an event that makes training for the French Foreign Legion seem like a relaxing vacation.

In keeping with the extreme conditions, competitors must shoulder all their own food, carry a distress flare in case of emergencies, and sleep in open-sided sack-cloth tents that provide little shelter from the blinding sandstorms.

Yet, despite its fearsome reputation, the race – now in its 24th year – regularly attracts over 800 participants. Some run to raise money for charity; others arrive hungry for adventure and the thrill of living dangerously. My own motives were similarly ambitious. Pricked by curiosity and inspired by the notoriously extreme conditions, I had long dreamt of the life-changing epiphanies and rugged psychological battles that I might encounter en route.

I wasn't to be disappointed. But, while the epiphanies were suitably vivid and the dusty terrain ingrained with plenty of painful memories, the surprise star of the race for me was not the heroic runners or the cheery organisers, but the sultry Moroccan desert – a landscape so barren and hostile yet, at the same time, so eerily beautiful.

Athletics

Think your workout routine is tough? Try comparing notes with Moroccan marathoners. Runners literally feel the burn each April in the annual Marathon des Sables (see opposite), which lasts seven days and covers 243km of scorching Sahara – 78 of them in a single stretch. Once they're warmed up, runners hit their high in May with the high-altitude Berber Marathon through the Atlas Mountains.

With training like this, Moroccans have been giving Kenyan frontrunners reason to watch their backs in international track events. Moroccan Nawal el-Moutawakel became the first Arab woman to win Olympic gold in 1984, when she nabbed the medal for the 400m hurdles. Middle-distance maverick Hicham el-Guerrouj became the first man to hold the world records for the mile and 1500m in 1999, and a national hero in Morocco when he took home Olympic gold for both the 1500m and 5000m events in 2004.

Even if you're no el-Moutawakel or el-Guerrouj yourself and ultramarathons aren't exactly your dream vacation, you can still enjoy a decent jog in Morocco. The annual Marrakesh Marathon in January gives runners a chance to run a lap around the city ramparts, through the *palmeraie,* and back again. Then again, somebody has to cheer on 50,000 runners from the comfort of a Djemaa el-Fna café, fresh-squeezed orange juice in hand…

Golf

Golf courses have become a royal nuisance in Morocco, and not just because of the killer sand traps. Given how much water and chemical fertilizer it takes to keep a fairway green in the desert, courses built by Pasha Glaoui and King Hassan II are a strain on Morocco's environment – not to mention private golf courses recently built outside Marrakesh, and others in the works near Essaouira and Oukaïmeden. Golfers who want to improve their game in more ways than one can head instead to La Pause (p314), an eco-friendly, turfless 'all-terrain' golf and disc-golf course in the desert outside Marrakesh.

Arts & Architecture

If it's true that we normally only use 10% of our brains, Morocco gives the other 90% something to do for a change. The stimulation doesn't stop, from mornings waking in awe in an authentic mudbrick *ksar* (castle) to wee hours spent entranced by a late-night Gnaoua *leila* (jam session). The mind reels trying to make sense of it all: ancient becomes avant-garde and vice versa, as traditions of Arabo-Andalusian music and Amazigh storytelling merge with Moroccan hip hop and independent cinema. Getting you good and gobsmacked is all part of the Moroccan master plan, so feel free to gawk. Moroccan artists are flattered by the attention, and after millennia of artistic accomplishment, they know full well they have it coming.

Author Tahir Shah moved his family from London to Casablanca to become a Moroccan storyteller groupie, collecting tales for his *In Arabian Nights: In Search of Morocco Through its Stories and Storytellers*.

ARTS

LITERATURE

Morocco has an ancient literary tradition that has only been recently recognised as such. Poetry and stories have traditionally been passed along by storytellers and singers, and in manuscripts circulated from one person to the next. As the population for the most part couldn't read or afford books, Morocco's oral tradition has helped keep shared legends and histories alive. Watch the storytellers, singers and scribes in Marrakesh's Djemaa el-Fna in action and you'll understand how Morocco's literary tradition has remained so vital and irrepressible – even with a long-standing policy of press censorship.

A Different Beat

The international spotlight first turned on Morocco's literary scene in the 1950s and '60s, when Beat Generation authors Paul and Jane Bowles took up residence in Tangier and began recording the stories of Moroccans they knew. From these efforts came Larb Layachi's *A Life Full of Holes* (written under the pseudonym Driss ben Hamed Charhadi), Mohammed Mrabet's *Love with a Few Hairs,* and Mohammed Choukri's *For Bread Alone.* Like a lot of Beat literature, these books are packed with sex, drugs and unexpected poetry – but if anything, they're more streetwise, humorous and heartbreaking.

The World's Embrace: Selected Poems is a collection of poems by Abdellatif Laâbi, founder of *Anfas/Souffles* (Breath), the poetry magazine that landed Laâbi eight years in prison for 'crimes of opinion' .

Coming up for Air

Encouraged by the outspoken 'Tangerine' authors, a Moroccan poet named Abdellatif Laâbi founded the free-form, free-thinking poetry magazine *Anfas/Souffles* (Breath) in 1966, not in the anything-goes international zone of Tangier, but in the royal capital of Rabat. What began as a journal soon became a movement of writers, painters and filmmakers heeding Laâbi's outcry against censorship: '*A la poubelle poème/ A la poubelle rythme/A la poubelle silence*' ('In the trash, poetry/In the trash, rhythm/In the trash, silence'). *Anfas/Souffles* published 21 more daring issues, until the censors shut it down in 1972 and sent Laâbi to prison for eight years for 'crimes of opinion'. Government censorship notwithstanding, the complete French text of *Anfas/Souffles* is now available online at http://clicnet.swarth more.edu/souffles/sommaire .html.

The literary expression that the magazine equated to breathing has continued unabated. In 1975, *Anfas/Souffles* co-founder and self-proclaimed 'linguistic guerrilla' Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine published his confrontational *Ce Maroc!,* an anthology of revolutionary writings. A Souss Berber himself, Khaïr-Eddine also called for the recognition of Berber identity and culture in his 1984 *Legend and Life of Agoun'chich*, which has emerged as a rallying cry for today's Berber Pride movement (see p35).

Living to Tell

Still more daring and distinctive Moroccan voices have found their way into print over the past two decades, both at home and abroad. Among the most famous works to be published by a Moroccan author are *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood* and *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Islam*, both by Fatima Mernissi, an outspoken feminist and professor at the University of Rabat. In Rabati author Leila Abouzeid's *The Year of the Elephant* and *The Director and Other Stories from Morocco*, tales of Moroccan women trying to reinvent life on their own terms become parables for Morocco's search for independence after colonialism.

In *Moroccan Folk Tales*, Jilali El Koudia presents 31 classic legends ranging from a Berber version of Snow White to a tale of a woman who cross-dresses as a Muslim scholar.

The past few years have brought increased attention to individual Moroccan writers and their dissenting opinions – an encouraging sign of openness under King Mohammed VI, and a positive counter-reaction to a war on terror that seems dangerously all-encompassing. Inspired by *Anfas/Souffles*, Fez-born expatriate author Tahar ben Jelloun combined poetic devices and his training as a psychotherapist in his celebrated novel *The Sand Child*, the story of a girl raised as a boy by her father in Marrakesh. He won France's Prix Goncourt for his book *The Sacred Night*. Several recent Moroccan novels have explored the promise and trauma of emigration, notably Mahi Binebine's harrowing *Welcome to Paradise* and Laila Lalami's celebrated *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*.

CINEMA & TV

Until recently Morocco has been seen mostly as a stunning movie backdrop, easily upstaging the actors in such dubious cinematic achievements

BOLLYWOOD IN THE SAHARA

'*Namaste, mohabbat!*' (Greetings, my love!). If you're South Asian, you may be met with a warbling chorus of Hindi hellos even in remote Moroccan oases. If this strikes you as a scene straight from a movie, you're exactly right: for 50 years, Morocco has been completely besotted with Bollywood.

When Morocco gained its independence in the 1950s, the anti-colonial themes and social realism of Indian cinema struck a deep chord. Morocco's small but influential resident Indian community began distributing Indian films that soon earned a loyal local following. Top Moroccan acting talents were recruited to dub and subtitle Indian movies into Darija and French, and generations of 'Bollyphiles' learned to sing along with the movie themes in Hindi. Not surprisingly, Bollywood stars were among the first honourees at the Marrakesh Film Festival, and at open-air screenings in the Djemaa el-Fna, there's no mistaking the Indian-import crowd favourites.

In 2005, more than a third of the movies shown on Morocco's 105 screens were Bollywood films, and 264 Hindi films were screened in Morocco in the first six months of 2006. Among the biggest Moroccan marquee draws are Salman Khan, Aishwarya Rai and Shah Rukh Khan – a 2008 Casablanca screening of *Chalte Chalte* starring Shah Rukh Kahn with an in-person appearance by co-star Rani Mukherjee drew 50,000 devoted fans. After half a century of ardent admiration, Bollywood is finally returning the love: in 2008, two Bollywood productions filmed scenes in Morocco. While you're visiting, maybe you can be an extra in that mountain-top dance sequence...

as *Alexander, Ishtar, Hideous Kinky, The Four Feathers*, *The Mummy*, *Troy* and *Sahara*. But while there's much to cringe about in Morocco's filmography, the country had golden moments on the silver screen in Hitchcock's *The Man Who Knew Too Much,* Orson Welles' *Othello* and David Lean's *Lawrence of Arabia*. Morocco has certainly proved its versatility: it stunt-doubled for Somalia in Ridley Scott's *Black Hawk Down*, Tibet in Martin Scorsese's *Kundun,* Lebanon in Stephen Gaghan's *Syriana,* and India in the BBC's 2008 production of *Brideshead Revisted.* Morocco also stole the show right out from under John Malkovich by playing itself in Bernardo Bertolucci's *The Sheltering Sky*, and untrained local actors Mohamed Akhzam and Boubker Ait El Caid held their own with the likes of Cate Blanchett and Brad Pitt in the 2006 Oscar- and BAFTA-nominated *Babel*. And talk about hard-working: Morocco serves as the location for more than 1000 French, German and Italian productions each year.

Profiles of Moroccan stars, movie-festival announcements, and free-speech updates are covered in expressive English on filmmaker Allal El Alaoui's blog: http://allal-cinemagoer.blogspot.com.

The movies Morocco gets paid to help make are not always the movies Moroccans pay to see. Traditionally, Moroccans prefer Bollywood and Egyptian movies to French dramas and Hollywood popcorn fare. But lately, Moroccans are getting greater opportunity to see films shot in Morocco that are actually by Moroccans and about Morocco. In 2006 and 2007, more than 50 Moroccan features and 100 short films were produced.

Lately Franco-Moroccan films have become serious contenders on the international festival circuit. Director Leila Marrakchi was awarded 'Un Certain Regard' at the 2005 Cannes Film Festival for her first feature, *Marock,* about a Muslim girl and Jewish boy who fall in love. Nabil Ayouch's light-hearted story, *Whatever Lola Wants,* filmed in Morocco and about an American attempting to learn old-school Egyptian belly dance, was a crowd-pleaser at New York's 2008 Tribeca Film Festival. Also making waves are Moroccan neo-realist films, including Jilali Ferhati's *Mémoire en Détention* (Memory in Detention), about an ex-con's attempts to track down relations of an inmate who lost his memory during his long detention, and Narjiss Nejjar's controversial *Les Yeux Secs* (Cry No More), about a former prostitute who returns to her Berber village to stop her daughter from being drawn into the local flesh trade.

None of the 1942 classic *Casablanca* was actually shot in Casablanca. It was filmed on a Hollywood backlot, and the Rick's Café Américain set was based on the historic El-Minzah hotel in Tangier (see p181).

Despite this creative boom, cinephiles have begun to fear for Morocco's movie palaces, since ticket prices can't compete with cheap pirated DVDs. In 2007, only 5% of Morocco's population went to the movies, while more than 400,000 pirated DVDs were symbolically seized from souq stalls in Rabat and Casablanca. But with the success of the Marrakesh International Film Festival, movie festivals are springing up across Morocco; check www.maghrebarts.ma/cinema.html for schedules. Morocco's deco movie palaces are becoming major tourist attractions for visiting movie buffs and architecture aficionados alike, and Tangier's historic 1930s Cinema Rif reopened in 2006 as Tangier Cinematheque, a nonprofit cinema featuring international independent films and documentaries. The Moroccan government is showing initiative, too: in 2008, the state launched Aflam, a new, free, national TV channel showcasing Moroccan-made movies, and films dubbed or subtitled in French, Darija and Tamazight.

MUSIC

Any trip to Morocco comes with its own syncopated soundtrack: women tapping out a beat with tea glasses on brass trays, hawkers singing the praises of knock-off Armani right over the early evening *adhan* (call to prayer), and the ubiquitous donkey-cart-drivers' chants of *'Balek!'* – fair

NOW HEAR THIS: MOROCCAN MUSIC FESTIVALS

Dates and locations may vary, so check www.maghrebarts.ma/musique.html for updates.

- January: Fez Andalusian Music Festival
- February: SidiRock (Metal Fest, Sidi Kacem, p64)
- March: Rencontres Musicales de Marrakesh (Classical)
- April: Magic Drâa (African Music Festival, Zagora), Festival of Sufi Culture (Fez, p242), Jazzablanca (Casablanca)
- May: Festival du Desert (Er-Rachidia, p464), Jazz aux Oudayas (Rabat), Tanjazz (Tangier, p179)
- June: Festival of World Sacred Music (Fez, p242), Gnaoua and World Music Festival (Essaouira, p161), Jazz du Chellah (Rabat)
- July: Marrakesh Popular Arts Festival (p464), Voix des Femmes (Women's Voices, Tetouan), Trance Atlantic (Safi), Festival Timitar (Amazigh Music, Agadir)
- August: Marriage Festival (Imilchil, p332)
- September: Atlantic Andalusian Music Fest (Essaouira)
- October: Rap MedinFes (Fez)
- December: Rencountres Casandalous (Andalusian Encounters, Casablanca)

warning that since donkeys don't yield, you'd better, and quick. As if this weren't enough to start you humming maniacally, there's also music booming out of taxis, ham radios and roadside stalls. For a memory bank of Maghrebi music any DJ would envy, sample these varieties.

Classical Arab-Andalusian Music

Leaving aside the thorny question of where exactly it originated (you don't want be the cause of the next centuries-long Spain–Morocco conflict, do you?) this music combines the flamenco-style strumming and heartstring-plucking drama of Spanish folk music with the finely calibrated stringed instruments, complex percussion and haunting half-tones of classical Arab music. Add poetic lyrics and the right singer at dinner performances, and you may find that lump in your throat makes it hard to swallow your *bastilla* (pigeon pie). Listen for it at classical-music festivals in Casablanca and Fez, and in concerts and fine restaurants across Morocco. Popular interpreters include Abdelkrim Rais and Amina Alaoui.

Check out Morocco's latest top 10 hits and hear Darija DJ stylings on RealPlayer audio at Radio Casablanca online: www.maroc.net/newrc.

Gnawa

Joyously bluesy with a rhythm you can't refuse, this music may send you into a trance – and that's just what it's meant to do. Gnawa began among freed slaves in Marrakesh and Essaouira as a ritual of deliverance from slavery and into God's graces. Watch the musicians work themselves into a state of ecstasy, with fezzes spinning and sudden backflips, and let their music set you free.

Join the crowds watching in Marrakesh's Djemaa el-Fna or at the annual Gnaoua and World Music Festival in Essaouira (p161), and hear Gnawa on Peter Gabriel's Real World music label. Gnawa *maâlem*s (master musicians) include Abdeslam Alikkane and his Tyour Gnaoua, famed fusion musician Hassan Hakmoun, Indian-inflected Nass Marrakech and reggae-inspired Omar Hayat. Since Gnawa are historically a brotherhood, historically most renowned Gnawa musicians have been men – but the all-women group Haddarates plays Gnawa trances traditionally reserved for women.

MOROCKIN' HARD: HEAVY METAL ROARS BACK

Not since Ozzy bit a live bat onstage has hard rock caused such an uproar. In 2003, police who didn't appreciate being rocked like a hurricane arrested 11 Moroccan metalheads for making their audiences 'listen, with bad intent, to songs which contravene good morals or incite debauchery'. Despite widespread protests that authorities were driving the crazy train, the rockers were ultimately sentenced to one year in jail for 'employing seductive methods with the aim of undermining the faith of a Muslim'.

But diehard Moroccan metalheads got organised, calling all rockers to the mosh pit in Sidi Kacem, an inland agricultural centre near Meknès better known for braying donkeys than wailing guitars. The second SidiRock festival was held in February 2008, showcasing bands from the area with names sure to warm any true metalhead's heart, if not a mullah's: Despotism from Casablanca, Krematorium from Kenitra, and Sidi Kacem's own Damned Creation. Far from pleather-clad '80s hair bands, these Moroccan groups write their own rebellious lyrics in English, and rock hardcore in black jeans and dreadlocks.

To see clips of the headbanging action, check out SidiRock's official MySpace page and YouTube channel at www.youtube.com/user/SidiRock – and for those about to SidiRock come February, we salute you.

Berber Folk Music

There's plenty of other indigenous Moroccan music besides Gnawa, thanks to the ancient Berber tradition of passing along songs and poetry from one generation to the next. You can't miss Berber music at village *moussem*s (festivals in honour of a local saint), Agadir's Timtar Festival of Amazigh music, the Marrakesh Popular Arts Festival and Imilchil's Marriage Festival, as well as weddings and other family celebrations.

The most renowned Berber folk group is the Master Musicians of Joujouka, who famously inspired the Rolling Stones, Led Zeppelin and William S Burroughs, and collaborated with them on experimental fusion with lots of clanging and crashing involved. Lately the big names are women's, including the all-women group B'net Marrakech and the bold Najat Aatabou, who sings protest songs in Berber against restrictive traditional roles. For more women vocalists, head to Tetouan for Voix des Femmes (Women's Voices) Festival.

To explore Amazigh music in a variety of styles, languages, and regions, check out samples, musician bios and CDs from basic bluesy Tartit to '70s-funky Tinariwen at www.azawan.com.

From Marock to Hibhub

Like the rest of the Arab world, Moroccans listen to a lot of Egyptian music, but Moroccopop is gaining ground. A generation of local DJs with cheeky names like Ramadan Special and DJ Al Intifada have mastered the art of the remix, and so have a few pop acts. Some of the more intriguing talents to emerge in recent years are Darga, a group that blends ska, Darija rap, and a horn section into Moroccan surf anthems; British-Moroccan U-Cef, who mixes Arab pop and hip hop with Gnawa to slick electronica effect; Moroccan singer-songwriter Hindi Zahra, Morocco's answer to Tori Amos with bluesy acoustic-guitar backing; and the bluntly named Ganga Fusion and Kif Samba, who both pound out a groovy mix of funk, Moroccan folk music, reggae and jazz. For something completely different, check out the burgeoning Megadeth-inspired Moroccan metal scene at annual SidiRock (see above).

But ask any guy on the street with baggy cargo shorts and a T-shirt with the slogan MJM (*Maroc Jusqu'al Mort,* Morocco 'Til Death) about Moroccan pop, and you'll get a crash course in *hibhub* (Darija for hip

(Continued on page 73)

(Continued from page 64)

hop). Meknès' H-Kayne rap gangsta-style, while Fez City Clan features a talented but annoying kid rapper, extravagantly rolled Rs and an Arabic string section. But the acts that consistently work the crowd into a frenzy are Agadir's DJ Key, who remixes hip-hop standards with manic scratching, and Marrakesh's Fnaire, mixing traditional Moroccan sounds with staccato vocal stylings. To get in the know before you go, check out video clips of these and other Moroccan hip-hop groups online and the soundtrack for the 2008 documentary *I Love HipHop in Morocco* (www.ilovehiphopinmorocco.com), which shows how groups struggle to get gigs and respect.

Author Laila Lalami tracks the latest developments in Moroccan pop culture from Moroccan hip hop to political scandals on her English-language blog at www.lailalalami.com/blog/archives/cat_all_things_moroccan.html

THEATRE & DANCE

When Shakespeare wrote 'All the world's a stage,' he must've had Morocco in mind. Every square, souq and sidewalk is action-packed, with lovers starring in mobile-phone-assisted dramas, shopkeepers wisecracking that you won't find better prices at an insane asylum, and passers-by pausing to supply the chorus on a ballad blasting out of a boom box. But if you think this opening scene is exciting, wait until you see Morocco's main act, *halqa* (Moroccan street theatre).

Enter storytellers, stage left, to parry with imaginary daggers and die countless fake deaths in battles worthy of Don Quixote. Look up, and you'll notice a human pyramid performing carefully synchronised dance movements, as an acrobat steadies his nerves for a flying leap to the top. As sun sets, cross-dressing belly dancers twirl their hands to distract from their five-o'clock shadows – and with an inviting flick of a spangled scarf, you could be the next on stage.

The show begins around dusk in the main square of any sizable Moroccan town, but the best venue is Marrakesh's legendary Djemaa el-Fna. After a 1000-year run, the Djemaa was finally given its due in 2001 as Unesco's first World Heritage Site for Oral Tradition. Morocco offers more formal performances in urban cultural centres and theatres, and Fez tries to organise the chaos into the Festival Populaire de l'Art de la Halqa each April; see www.maghrebarts.ma/theatre.html for upcoming events.

Dinner Theatre

Programmed folk entertainment can't always match the nightly improvised drama in the Djemaa. This is certainly true of *fantasia*s, faux-folkloric theatre-restaurant spectacles big on chaotic horseback charges, blaring musket salutes and other noisy displays thwarting attempts to digest the cold grilled meats on offer. Some restaurants also offer a 'dinner spectacle', complete with belly dancers (not part of Morocco's dance tradition, but a Turkish import), Gnawa gamely trying to compete with clattering dishes, and 'candle dancers' balancing brass trays of lit candles on their heads like Dr Seuss characters. For better entertainment value, all you need is a café seat with a view of the town square, and a handful of coins to show appreciation for the talents on display.

No, that's not a musical rugby scrum: the *haidous* is a complex circle dance with musicians in the middle, often performed in celebration of the harvest.

VISUAL ART

The usual arts and crafts hierarchy is reversed in Morocco, where the craft tradition (see p65) is ancient and revered, while visual art is something of a minor, more recent development. Ornament is meant to be spiritually uplifting, while nonfunctional objects and

representational images are often considered pointless – or worse, vanity verging on idolatry, as it is perceived in orthodox Judaism and some (though not all) Muslim societies. No doubt you will see paintings of eyelash-batting veiled women and scowling turbaned warriors, but these come from a 19th-century French Orientalist tradition and are mostly made for export – they're not generally considered the finest art Morocco has to offer.

Artworks dubbed 'Orientalist' are trying too hard to fit the 'exotic Moroccan' mould – not exactly a compliment, as Edward Said explains in *Orientalism*, his breakthrough critique of Western distortions of Middle Eastern culture.

In the 1950s and '60s, folk artists in Essaouira and Tangier made painting and sculpture their own by incorporating Berber symbols and locally scavenged materials. Landscape painting also became a popular way to express pride of place in Essaouira and Assilah, and abstract painting became an important means of poetic expression in Rabat and Casablanca. The emerging Marrakesh art scene combines abstract expressionism with traditional media, and is reinventing calligraphy as an expressive art form. Photography had no such luck, and is still mostly stuck in documentary mode in Morocco – unless you count all those glamour shots of the king on display everywhere.

Calligraphy

Calligraphy is Morocco's most esteemed visual-art form, practised and perfected in Moroccan *medersas* (Quranic schools) over the last 1000 years. In Morocco, calligraphy isn't just in the Quran: it's on tiled walls, inside stucco arches, and literally coming out of the woodwork. Look carefully, and you'll notice that the same text can have an incredibly different effect in another calligraphic style. One calligrapher might take up a whole page with a single word, while another might turn it into a flower, or fold and twist the letters origami style into graphic patterns.

You too can read Islamic calligraphy: vertical lines are usually consonants, smaller marks above and below are vowels, and that tall letter that looks like the letter 'l' is probably an *alif*, the first letter in Allah.

The style most commonly used for Qurans is Naskh, a slanting cursive script introduced by the Umayyads. Cursive letters ingeniously interlaced to form a shape or dense design are hallmarks of the Thuluth style, while high-impact graphic lettering is the Kufic style from Iraq. You'll see three main kinds of Kufic calligraphy in Morocco: angular, geometric letters are square Kufic; ones bursting into bloom are foliate Kufic; and letters that look like they've been tied by sailors are knotted Kufic.

ARCHITECTURE

Stubbed toes come with the territory in Morocco: with so much intriguing architecture to gawp at, you can't always watch where you're going. Some buildings are more memorable than others – as in any developing country, there's a fair amount of makeshift housing and cheap concrete here – but it's the striking variation in architecture that keeps you wondering what could possibly be down the block and over that mountain range. Here is a brief catalogue of Moroccan landmarks most likely to leave your jaw on tiled floors, and your toes in constant jeopardy.

LANDMARKS

Mosque

Even small villages may have more than one mosque, built on prime real estate in town centres with one wall facing Mecca. Mosques provide moments of sublime serenity in chaotic cities and busy village market days, and though non-Muslims are not allowed to enter (except in Rabat's Hassan II Mosque), even passers-by can sense their calming influence.

Towering minarets not only aid the acoustics of the call to prayer, but provide a visible reminder of God and community that puts everything else – spats, dirty dishes, office politics – back in perspective.

Muslim visitors claim that no Moroccan architecture surpasses buildings built for the glory of God, especially mosques in the ancient Islamic spiritual centre of Fez. With walls and ablutions fountains covered in lustrous green and white Fassi *zellij* (ceramic-tile mosaic) and a mihrab (niche indicating the direction of Mecca) elaborately outlined in stucco and marble, Fez mosques are purpose-built for spiritual uplift. Non-Muslims can see Morocco's most historic *minbar* (pulpit): the 12th-century Koutoubia *minbar,* inlaid with silver, ivory and marquetry by Cordoba's finest artisans, and housed in Marrakesh's Badi Palace (p302).

The only mosque non-Muslims are allowed to visit in Morocco is Casablanca's Hassan II Mosque (p105). It's the world's third-largest mosque, so you won't be cramping anyone's style.

Souq

As thrillingly chaotic as Morocco's ancient cities seem, there is a certain logic to their zoning that you can still discern today in Fez, Meknès and Marrakesh. At the centre of the medina (old city), you'll find labyrinthine souqs (covered market streets) beneath lofty minarets, twin symbols of the ruling power's worldly ambitions and higher aspirations. Souq means 'market', and the same word is used to describe weekly village farmers markets – but once you've gotten lost in the souqs of Marrakesh or Fez, you'll agree there's no comparison. In these ancient medinas you can still see how souqs were divided into zones by trade, so that medieval shoppers would know exactly where to head for pickles or camel saddles. The smelliest, messiest trades were pushed to the peripheries, so you'll know you're near the edge of the medina when you arrive at tanneries, livestock markets and egg souqs.

In Morocco, souqs are often covered with palm fronds for shade and shelter, and criss-crossed with smaller streets lined with food stalls, storerooms, and cubby-hole-sized artisans, studios carved into thick mudbrick walls. Unlike souqs, these smaller streets often do not have names, and are collectively known as *qissaria*. Most *qissariat* are through streets, so when (not if) you get lost in them, keep heading onward until you intersect the next souq or buy a carpet, whichever happens first.

Ramparts

Dramatic form follows defensive function in many of Morocco's trading posts and ports. The Almoravids took no chances with their trading capital, and wrapped Marrakesh in 16km of pink *pisé* (mudbrick reinforced with clay and chalk), 2m thick. Coastal towns like Essaouira and Assilah have witnessed centuries of piracy and fierce Portuguese–Moroccan trading rivalries – hence the heavy stone walls dotted by cannons, and crenellated ramparts that look like medieval European castles.

Spain and Morocco still dispute sovereignty over the coastal towns of Ceuta and Melilla, and the local architecture does nothing to resolve the conflict. Those siding with Spain point out Andalusian elements, which Moroccans will certainly remind you developed under Almohad rule (for more on Almohad accomplishments, see p37).

Kasbah

Wherever there were once commercial interests worth protecting in Morocco – salt, sugar, gold, slaves – you'll find a kasbah. These fortified quarters housed the ruling family, its royal guard, and all the necessities for living in case of siege. The *mellah* (Jewish quarter) would be positioned within reach of the kasbah guard and the ruling power's watchful

eye (for more on Moroccan *mellahs*, see p41). One of the largest remaining kasbahs is Marrakesh's 11th-century kasbah, which still houses a royal palace and acres of gardens and abuts Marrakesh's *mellah*. Among the most scenic are the red kasbah overlooking all-blue Chefchaouen, and Rabat's whitewashed seaside kasbah (p120) with its elegantly carved gate, the Bab Ouidia.

The most famous kasbah is Aït Benhaddou (p339), the rose-coloured mudbrick fortification complete with impressive crenellated watchtowers, an *agadir* (fortified granary), and a prime desert location overlooking a river valley. Don't be surprised if you recognise the place on sight; it's frequently used by nearby Ouarzazate movie studios as a romantic film backdrop. Some historians date Aït Benhaddou to the 11th century, but like a true movie star, this kasbah is high maintenance and constantly retouched.

Other kasbahs have not been so lucky. Unesco saved the Glaoui Taourirt kasbah in Ouarzazate, which is now used as a film backdrop, but the once-spectacular Glaoui kasbahs at Taliouine, Tamdaght and Telouet have been largely abandoned to the elements – go and see them now, before they're gone. These are deeply ambivalent monuments: they represent the finest Moroccan artistry (no one dared displease the Glaoui despots) but also the betrayal of the Alawites by the Pasha Glaoui, who collaborated with French colonists to suppress his fellow Moroccans. But locals argue Glaoui kasbahs should be preserved, as visible reminders that even the grandest fortifications were no match for independent-minded Moroccans.

'From the austere metre-thick mudbrick walls, you'd never guess what splendours await beyond those brass-studded doors'

Riad

Near the palace in Morocco's imperial cities are grand riads, courtyard mansions where families of royal relatives, advisors and rich merchants whiled away idle hours gossiping in *bhous* (seating nooks) around arcaded courtyards paved with *zellij* and filled with songbirds twittering in fruit trees. Not a bad setup, really, and one you can enjoy today as a guest in one of the many converted riad guest houses in Marrakesh and Fez. So many riads have become B&Bs over the past decade that riad has become a synonym for guest house – but technically, an authentic riad has a courtyard garden divided in four parts, with a fountain in the centre (for more on riad ownership, see p54). With more than 1000 authentic riads, including extant examples from the 15th century, Marrakesh is the riad capital of North Africa.

From the austere metre-thick mudbrick walls, you'd never guess what splendours await beyond those brass-studded doors: painted cedar ceilings, ironwork balconies and archways dripping with stucco. Upkeep on these architectural gems isn't easy, and modernising mudbrick structures with plumbing and electricity without destabilising the foundations is especially tricky. But for all its challenges, this ancient material may be the building material of the future. Mudbrick insulates against street sound, keeps cool in summer and warm in winter, and wicks away humidity instead of trapping it like mouldy old concrete – no wonder green builders around the world are incorporating it into their construction methods.

Hammam

Talk about neat freaks: the first thing the Almohads did after they seized power was raze unruly Marrakesh and its misaligned Koutoubia mosque, and start building 83 hammams (public bathhouses) in Fez. These domed buildings have been part of the Moroccan urban landscape ever since,

and every village aspires to a hammam of its own. Traditionally they are built of mudbrick, lined with *tadelakt* (hand-polished limestone plaster that traps moisture) and capped with a dome with star-shaped vents to let steam escape. The domed main room is the coolest area, with side rooms offering increasing levels of heat to serve the vaguely arthritic to the woefully hungover.

The boldly elemental forms of traditional hammams may strike you as incredibly modern, but actually it's the other way around. The hammam is a recurring feature of landscapes by modernist masters Henri Matisse and Paul Klee, and Le Corbusier's International Style modernism was inspired by the interior volumes and filtered light of these iconic domed North African structures. *Tadelakt* has become a sought-after surface treatment for pools and walls in high-style homes, and pierced domes incorporated into the 'Moroccan Modern' style feature in umpteem coffee-table books. To see these architectural features in their original context, pay a visit to your friendly neighbourhood hammam – there's probably one near the local mosque, since hammams traditionally shared a water source with ablutions fountains.

Why'd they build it that way? Eight of the world's leading Islamic architectural scholars give you their best explanations in *Architecture of the Islamic World: Its History and Social Meaning*, by Oleg Grabar et al.

Zawiya

Don't be fooled by modest appearances or remote locations in Morocco: even a tiny village teetering off the edge of a cliff may be a major draw across Morocco because of its *zawiya* (shrine to a *marabout*). Just being in the vicinity of a *marabout* (saint) is said to confer *baraka* (a state of grace). Zawiya Naciria in Tamegroute is reputed to cure the ill, and the *zawiya* of Moulay Ismail on the Kik Plateau in the High Atlas is said to increase the fertility of female visitors (consider yourself warned). Most *zawiyas* are closed to non-Muslims – including the famous Zawiya Moulay Idriss II in Fez, and all seven of Marrakesh's *zawiyas* – but you can often recognise a *zawiya* by its ceramic green-tiled roof and air of calm even outside its walls. To boost your *baraka*, you can visit the *zawiya* of Moulay al-Sherif in Rissani (p368), which is now open to non-Muslims.

Medersa

More than schools of rote religious instruction, Moroccan *medersas* have been vibrant centres of learning about law, philosophy and astrology since the Merenid dynasty. For enough splendour to lift the soul and distract all but the most devoted students, visit the *zellij*-bedecked 14th-century Medersa el-Attarine (p236) in Fez and its rival for top students, the intricately carved and stuccoed Al-Ben Youssef Medersa (p298) in Marrakesh. Now open as museums, these *medersas* give some idea of the austere lives students led in sublime surroundings, with long hours of study, several room-mates, dinner on a hotplate, sleeping mats for comfort, and one bathroom for up to 900 students.

Most *medersas* remain closed to non-Muslims, but at Zawiya Naciria in Tamegroute, visitors can glimpse the still-functioning *medersa* while visiting the library of handwritten texts dating from the 13th century. Muslim visitors can stay overnight in Moroccan *medersas*, though arrangements should be made in advance and a modest donation is usually appreciated.

Fondouq

Since medieval times, these creative courtyard complexes featured ground-floor artisans' workshops and rented rooms upstairs – from the

nonstop *fondouq* flux of artisans and adventurers emerged cosmopolitan ideas and new inventions. *Fondouqs* once dotted caravan routes, but as trading communities became more stable and affluent, most *fondouqs* were gradually replaced with private homes and storehouses. Happily, 140 *fondouqs* remain in Marrakesh, including notable ones near Place Bab Ftueh and one on Rue Mouassine (p303) featured in the film *Hideous Kinky*. The king recently announced a Dh40 million plan to spruce up 98 *fondouqs,* so now's the time to see them in all their well-travelled, shop-worn glory.

Ksar

The location of *ksour* (mudbrick castles, plural of *ksar*) are spectacularly formidable: atop a rocky crag, against a rocky cliff, or rising above a palm oasis. Towers made of metres-thick, straw-reinforced mudbrick are elegantly tapered at the top to distribute the weight, and capped by zigzag *merlon* (crenellation). Like a desert mirage, a *ksar* will play tricks with your sense of scale and distance with its odd combination of grandeur and earthy intimacy. From these watchtowers, Timbuktu seems much closer than 52 days away by camel – and in fact, the elegant mudbrick architecture of Mali and Senegal is a near relative of Morocco's *ksour*.

'Like a desert mirage, a *ksar* will play tricks with your sense of scale and distance…'

To get the full effect of this architecture in its natural setting, visit the *ksour*-packed Drâa and Dadès valleys. Of particular note are the ancient Jewish *ksar* in Tamnougalt (p346) and the three-tone pink/gold/white *ksar* of Aït Arbi, teetering on the edge of a gorge. Between the Drâa Valley and Dadès Valley, you can stay overnight in an ancient *ksar* in the castle-filled oases of Skoura and N'Kob. But don't stop there: the Middle Atlas also has spectacular *ksour* rising between snowcapped mountain peaks, including a fine hilltop tower that once housed the entire 300-person community of Zaouiat Ahnsal (p331).

Deco Villa

When Morocco came under colonial control, villes nouvelles (new cities) were built outside the walls of the medina, with street grids and modern architecture imposing new order. Neoclassical facades, Mansard roofs and high-rises must have come as quite a shock when they were introduced by the French and Spanish – especially for the Moroccan taxpayers footing colonial construction bills.

But one style that seemed to bridge local Islamic geometry and streamlined European modernism was art deco. Painter Jacques Majorelle brought a Moroccan colour sensibility to deco in 1924, livening up the spare surfaces of his villa and garden with bursts of blue, green and acid yellow (see Jardin Majorelle, p304). In its 1930s heyday, Casablanca cleverly grafted Moroccan geometric detail onto whitewashed European edifices, adding a signature Casablanca deco (also called Mauresque) look to villas, movie palaces and hotels. Today you'll see elements of Casablanca deco all over Morocco – in architecture and in everyday life, Morocco is making a noteworthy effort to balance its indigenous traditions and global outlook.

Food & Drink

Moroccan cuisine is the stuff of myth and legend – and sometimes sheer befuddlement, thanks to many seemingly indecipherable menus. Awkwardly phrased English and French menu descriptions often appear to require a special decoder ring, so visitors end up sticking to what they already know of Moroccan cuisine: couscous and tajines. Many other scrumptious Moroccan breakfast, lunch and dinner options are described in this chapter to take some of the mystery out of the menu, and help you explore your full range of dining options in Morocco.

Get adventurous with the menu in Morocco, and your tastebuds will thank you. Have no fear of the salad course, since these vegetable dishes are mostly cooked or peeled and among Morocco's finest culinary offerings. Entrées ominously described as 'spicy' on Moroccan menus are probably not overly hot or piquant – there could just be an extra pinch of delicate saffron or savoury-sweet cinnamon involved. Dessert is a temptation you won't want to resist, and includes flaky pastries rich with nuts and aromatic traces of orange-flower water. In other words, come hungry.

Casablanca-raised Kitty Morse shows how a *diffa* is done in *Cooking at the Kasbah: Recipes from My Moroccan Kitchen*, from soup (*harira* savoury bean potage) to nuts (in almond *kaab al-ghazal* cookies).

GET FRESH IN MOROCCO

The food you find in Morocco is likely to be fresh, locally grown and homemade, rather than shipped in from Brazil, microwaved and served semi thawed. Most Moroccan produce is cultivated in small quantities the old-fashioned way, without GMOs (genetically modified organisms), chemical pesticides or even mechanisation. These technologies are far too costly an investment for the average small-scale Moroccan farmer, as is

VEGETARIANS: GRAZE THE DAY AWAY IN MOROCCO

- **Breakfast** Load up on Moroccan pastries, pancakes, fresh fruit and the inimitable orange juice. Fresh goat's cheese and olives from the souq are solid savoury choices with fresh-baked *khoobz (*bread). Steer clear of bubbling roadside vats if you're squeamish – they probably contain snails or sheep's-head soup.
- **Lunch** After a filling breakfast, try the *mezze* of salads, which come with fresh bread and may range from delicate cucumbers in orange-blossom water to substantial herbed beets laced with kaffir lime. In wintertime, couscous with seven vegetables or Berber tajine with pumpkin and onions are warming, filling alternatives. Pizza is another widely available and inexpensive menu option, best when spiked with local herbs and olives.
- **Snacks** Here's where vegetarians go wild. Dried fruit and nuts are scrumptious and ubiquitous in market stalls featuring cascades of figs, dates and apricots alongside towering cones of roasted nuts with salt, honey, cinnamon, cane sugar or hot pepper. Chickpeas and other pulses are roasted, served hot in a paper cone with cumin and salt, and not to be missed. Tea-time menus at swanky restaurants may feature *broiuats,* cigar-shaped pastries stuffed with goat's cheese or egg and herbs, plus finger sandwiches, pastries and cakes. If that's not enough, there's always ice cream, and mint tea with cookies or nuts are hardly ever more than a carpet shop away.
- **Dinner** For a hearty change of pace from salads and couscous, try a vegetarian pasta (anything with eggplant is especially tasty) or omelette (usually served with thick-cut fries). If you're staying in a Moroccan guest house, before you leave in the morning you can usually request a vegetarian tajine made to order with market-fresh produce. Pity you can't do that at home, right?

organic certification and labelling – so though you may not see a label on it to this effect, much of the Moroccan produce you'll find in food markets is pesticide-free and GMO-free.

The splendid appearance, fragrance and flavour of Moroccan market produce will leave you with a permanent grudge against those wan, shrivelled items trying to pass themselves off as food at the supermarket. There's a reason for this: Moroccan produce is usually harvested by hand when ripe, and bought directly from farmers in the souqs. Follow the crowds of Moroccan grandmothers and restaurant sous-chefs to the carts and stalls offering the freshest produce. Just be sure to peel, cook, or thoroughly wash produce before you eat it, since your stomach may not yet be accustomed to local microbes.

More than 138 reader-rated Moroccan recipes from foodie magazines *Gourmet* and *Bon Appétit* are online at www.epicurious.com, including quick and healthy options and suggested wine pairings.

Here's what to look for on the menu and in the market, at its most ripe and delicious:

Autumn Figs, pomegranates, grapes.
Spring Apricots, cherries, strawberries, peaches.
Summer Watermelon, wild artichokes, tomatoes.
Winter Oranges, mandarins, onions, beets, carrots, potatoes and other root vegetables.
Year-round Almonds, walnuts, bananas, squash, pumpkin, fava beans, green beans, lentils, eggplant, peppers, lemons (fresh and preserved).

For Moroccan recipes, a glossary of Arabic ingredients, and Moroccan cooking tips and anecdotes, surf Moroccan Gateway's foodie links at www.al-bab.com/maroc/food.htm.

Carnivores and sustainability-minded eaters can finally put aside their differences and chow down in Morocco. As you may guess, watching sheep and goat scamper over mountains and valleys in Morocco, herds live a charmed existence here – until dinner time, that is. Consequently, most of the meat you'll enjoy in Morocco is free-range, antibiotic-free, and raised on a steady diet of grass and wild herbs. If you wonder why lamb and mutton is so much more flavourful in Morocco than the stuff back home, there's your answer.

PLAYING FAVOURITES

If there is one food you adore or a dish you detest, you might want to plan your visit to Morocco accordingly. Morocco offers an incredible bounty of produce, meats and fish, but these vary seasonally. The country's relative lack of infrastructure and hard currency can be advantageous to visitors – hence the picturesque mountain villages that seem untouched

BEEN THERE, EATEN THAT

Eat your way across Morocco north to south with these outstanding regional dishes:
Casablanca *Seksu bedawi* (couscous with seven vegetables)
Chefchaouen *Djaj bil berquq* (chicken with prunes)
Demnate *Seksu Demnati* (couscous made with corn or barley instead of semolina)
Essaouira *Hut Mqalli (*fish tajine with saffron, ginger and preserved lemons), *djej kadra toumiya* (chicken with almonds, onions and chickpeas in buttery saffron sauce).
Fez *Kennaria* (stew with wild thistle/artichoke, with or without meat), *hut bu'etob* (baked shad filled with almond-stuffed dates).
High Atlas *Mechoui* (slow-roasted stuffed lamb or beef).
Marrakesh *Bessara* (fava beans with cumin, paprika, olive oil and salt), *tangia* (crockpot stew of seasoned lamb, vegetables and onions cooked eight to 12 hours in a hammam, or sauna).
Meknès *Kamama* (lamb stewed with ginger, *smen*, saffron, cinnamon and sweet onions).
Southern Coast *Amelou* (argan-nut paste with honey and argan oil).
Tangier Local variations on tapas and *paella* (Spanish dish made from rice, shellfish, chicken and vegetables).

LOCAL TREATS

Agadir Oranges, lemons, argan oil
Casablanca Cactus fruit
Dades Edible rosebuds, rosewater
Doukkala Melons
Erfoud Dates
Essaouira Fish, argan oil
Fez Wild artichokes, olive oil, oranges, orange-flower water, lemons
Marrakesh Pomegranates
Meknès Mint, olives, olive oil
Oualidia Oysters
Rif Walnuts, chestnuts, citrus, goat's cheese
Safi Shellfish
Sebou Shad, shad-roe caviar
Sefrou Cherries
Souss Almonds, lamb, dates
Tagoundaft Honey

by time, and the jackpot of dirhams you get for your euros – but this also makes importing produce tricky at best. This means that if you're visiting in the fall, you may have to enjoy fresh figs instead of kiwi fruit (not exactly a hardship).

When you consider your menu options, you'll also want to consider geography. Oualidia oysters may not be so fresh by the time they cross mountain passes to Ouarzazate, and Sefrou cherries can be hard to come by in Tiznit. So if your vacation plans revolve around lavish seafood dinners, head for the coasts; vegetarians visiting desert regions should have a high tolerance for dates. For hints on where to find your favourite foods, see Local Treats (above).

BUT WAIT, THERE'S MORE...

One final and important tip: pace yourself. Moroccan meals can be lengthy and generous, and might seem a bit excessive to an unyielding waistband. Take your time and drink plenty of water throughout your meal, especially with wine and in dry climates, instead of pounding a drink at the end. There are better ways to end a meal than dehydration and bloating – namely, a dessert *bastilla* (multilayered pastry) with toasted almonds, cinnamon and cream. Your Moroccan hosts may urge you on like a cheerleading squad in a pie-eating contest, but obey your instincts and quit when you're full with a heartfelt '*alhamdulallah*!' (Thanks to God!)

Ignore the search engine ads and scroll your way to culinary inspiration at www.astray.com/recipes/?search=moroccan, which lists more than 350 Moroccan-themed recipes with varying levels of difficulty and authenticity.

WHAT'S FOR AL-FTOUR (BREAKFAST)?

Even if your days back home begin with just coffee, it would be a culinary crime to skip breakfast in Morocco. Whether you grab yours on the go in the souqs or sit down to a leisurely repast, you are in for a treat. Breakfasts are rarely served before 9am in guest houses and hotels, so early risers in immediate need of coffee will probably have to head to a café or hit the souqs.

Street Eats

Sidewalk cafés and kiosks put a local twist on Continental breakfast, with Moroccan pancakes and doughnuts, French pastries, coffee and mint tea.

ALL HAIL THE DADA

There's a reason why breakfasts at many Moroccan homes and guest houses are so much better than in big hotels, and you'll find her presiding over the kitchen. *Dada*s (cooks) used to spend their entire careers in the service of just one Moroccan family – sometimes a royal one. The royal *dada*s of yore were brought from as far away as Mali and Senegal, and rarely left the palace. But with increased competition for their services from guest houses, restaurants and a growing middle-class, they are now free agents who command respect, real salaries and creative control.

At mealtimes, you might glimpse the *dada* cooking up royal feasts with whatever looked freshest in the market that morning, usually without a recipe or a measuring cup. If those dreamy figs poached in honeyed orange-flower water gave you a whole new reason to get up in the morning, ask to thank the *dada* personally – this is your chance for a brush with culinary greatness.

Follow your nose and rumbling stomach into the souqs, where you'll find tangy olives and local *jiben* (fresh goat's or cow's milk cheese) to be devoured with fresh *khoobz* (Moroccan-style pita bread baked in a wood-fire oven until it's crusty on the outside, yet fluffy and light on the inside). *Khoobz* can be found wrapped in paper at any *hanout* (cupboard-sized corner shops found in every neighbourhood).

In the souqs, you can't miss vendors with their carts piled high with fresh fruit, singing their own praises. They're right: you'll never know how high oranges can be stacked or how delicious freshly squeezed *aseer limoon* (orange juice) can be until you pay a visit to a Moroccan juice-vendor's cart. Drink yours from a disposable cup or your own water bottle, because the vendor's glasses are rinsed and reused dozens of times daily.

For tips on Moroccan street food and foodie adventures to get you salivating, visit Lydia Beyoud's blog at http://lallalydia.blogspot.com.

One savoury southern breakfast just right for chilly mornings is *bessara* (a steaming hot fava-bean puree with cumin, olive oil, and a dash of paprika) best when mopped up with *khoobz* still warm from the communal oven right down the street. For a twist on the usual French breakfast pastries, try *rghaif* (flaky, dense Moroccan pastries like flattened croissants), usually served with warm honey or apricot jam. Protein fiends will enjoy *rghaif* stuffed with *khlii* (sundried strips of spiced beef, like beef jerky). The truly adventurous can start their day with a rich stew of lamb's head or calves' feet, generously ladled into an enamel bowl from a huge vat precariously balanced on a makeshift Buddha gas burner.

Breakfast of Champions

As a guest in a Moroccan home, you'd be treated to the best of everything, and the best guest houses scrupulously uphold this Moroccan tradition each morning. You'll carbo-load like a Moroccan marathoner, with some combination of the following to jumpstart your day:

Ahwa (Coffee) is one option, but also *café au lait*, *thé b'na na* (tea with mint) or *thé wa hleb* (tea with milk), *wa* (with) or *bla* (without) *sukur* (sugar).
Aseer limoon (Orange juice)
Bayd (Eggs) in omelettes, cooked with a dash of *kamun* (freshly ground cumin) or *zataar* (cumin with toasted sesame seeds).
Beghrir Moroccan pancakes with an airy, spongy texture like crumpets, with honey or jam.
French pastries Croissants, *pain au chocolat* and others.
Khoobz Usually served with butter and jam or olive oil and *zataar*.
Rghaif Flat, buttery Moroccan pastries.
Seasonal fruit (see p79).
Sfenj Moroccan doughnuts.

LET'S DO EL-GHDA (LUNCH)

Lunch is traditionally the biggest meal of the day in Morocco, followed by a nice nap through the heat of the day. The lunch hour here is really a three- to four-hour stretch from noon to 3pm or 4pm, when most shops and facilities are closed, apart from a few stores catering to tourists.

For speed eaters this may seem inconvenient, but especially in summer it's best to do as the locals do, and treat lunchtime as precious downtime. Tuck into a tajine, served à la carte with crusty bread, or upgrade to a *prix fixe*, three-course lunch at a fancy restaurant. Afterwards, you'll have a whole new appreciation for mint tea and afternoon naps.

Join the conversation about Moroccan cooking already in progress at http://groups.yahoo.com/group/bstilla, an English-language online forum covering bastilla, tajine, and other Moroccan dishes.

Snak Attack

If you're still digesting your lavish guest-house breakfast come lunchtime, try one of the many *snak*s (kiosks) and small restaurants offering lighter fare – just look for people clustered around sidewalk kiosks, or a sign or awning with the word *snak*. Many hard-working locals do not take afternoon siestas, and instead eat sandwiches on the go. At the risk of stating the obvious, always join the queue at the one thronged with locals: Moroccans are picky about their *snak*s, preferring the cleanest establishments that use the freshest ingredients.

Here's what you'll find on offer at a *snak*:

Brochettes Kebabs rubbed with salt and spices, grilled on a skewer and served with *khoobz* and *harissa* (capsicum-pepper sauce), cumin and salt. Among the most popular varieties are lamb, chicken, *kefta* (spiced meatballs of ground lamb and/or beef) and the aggressively flavourful 'mixed meat' (usually lamb or beef plus heart, kidney and liver).

Merguez Hot, spicy, delicious homemade lamb sausage, not to be confused with *teyhan* (stuffed spleen) – *merguez* is usually reddish in colour, while *teyhan* is pale.

Pizza Now found at upscale *snaks* catering to the worldly Moroccan middle-class. Look for *snaks* boasting wood-fire ovens, and try tasty local versions with olives, onions, tomatoes, Atlantic anchovies and wild thyme.

Shawarma Spiced lamb or chicken roasted on a spit and served with *tahina* (sesame sauce) or yoghurt, with optional onions, salad, *harissa* and a dash of *sumac* (a tart, pickle-ish purple spice; highly recommended).

Tajines The famous Moroccan stews cooked in conical earthenware pots that keep the meat unusually moist and tender. The basic tajines served at a roadside *snak* are usually made with just a few ingredients, pulled right off a camping stove or *kanun* (earthenware brazier), and plonked down on a ramshackle folding table. Don't let appearances fool you: these can be some of the best tajines you'll eat in Morocco. So pull up a stool and dig in, using your *khoobz* as your utensil instead of rinsed-and-reused flatware.

Expand your Moroccan cooking repertoire beyond the obligatory cinnamon-dusted orange slices with Fatema Hel's *Authentic Recipes from Morocco: 60 Simple and Delicious Recipes from the Land of the Tagine*.

The Moroccan Power Lunch

Some upscale Moroccan restaurants that serve an evening *diffa* (feast) to tourist hordes serve a scaled-down menu at lunch, when wait staff

NAME THAT SAUCE

What's in your dish that makes it so tasty? Probably one of four main kinds of stock, which you can distinguish by colour:

- light yellow *mqalli* is a base of saffron, oil and ginger
- golden *msharmal* has saffron, ginger and a dash of pepper
- orange or reddish *mhammar* includes paprika, cumin and butter
- beige *qadra* is made of *smen* (aged, seasoned clarified butter) with vegetable stock, chickpeas and almonds.

SEXY SEKSU

Berbers call it *seksu*, *New York Times* food critic Craig Claiborne called it one of the dozen best dishes in the world, and when you're in Morocco, you can call couscous lunch. You know that yellowish stuff that comes in a box, with directions on the side instructing you to add boiling water and let stand for three minutes? That doesn't count. What Moroccans call couscous is a fine, pale, grain-sized, hand-rolled pasta lightly steamed with aromatic broth until toothsome and fluffy, served with a selection of vegetables and/or meat or fish in a delicately flavoured reduction of stock and spices.

Couscous isn't a simple side dish but rather the main event of a Moroccan meal, whether tricked out Casablanca-style with seven vegetables, heaped with lamb and vegetables in Fez, or served with tomatoes, fish and fresh herbs in Essaouira. Many delicious couscous dishes come without meat, including the pumpkin couscous of Marrakesh and a simple yet savoury High Atlas version with stewed onions, but scrupulous vegetarians will want to enquire in advance whether that hearty stock is indeed vegetarian. On occasion a couscous dish can be ordered à la carte, but usually it's a centrepiece of a multicourse lunch or celebratory *diffa* – and when you get a mouthful of the stuff done properly, you'll see why.

are more relaxed, the clientele is more local and the meal is sometimes a fraction of the price you'd pay for dinner. You might miss the live music and inevitable belly dancing that would accompany your supper – but then again, you might not. Three courses may seem a bit much for lunch, but don't be daunted: what this usually means is a delightful array of diminutive vegetable dishes, followed by a fluffy couscous and/or a small meat or chicken tajine, capped with the obligatory mint tea.

Hold the hot sauce: dousing your tajine with *harissa* (capsicum-pepper sauce) is generally done in Tunisia, Morocco's rival in the kitchen and football field.

MEZZE (SALAD COURSE)

The salad course is a bonanza for vegetarians, with fresh bread and three to five small plates that might include lemony beet salad with chives, herbed potatoes, cumin-spiked chickpeas, a relish of roasted tomatoes and caramelised onions, pumpkin puree with cinnamon and honey, and roasted, spiced eggplant dip so rich it's often called 'aubergine caviar'.

TAJINE & COUSCOUS

The main course is usually a tajine and/or couscous – a quasi-religious experience in Morocco not to be missed (see Sexy Seksu, above). The most common tajine choices are *dujaj mqalli bil hamd markd wa zeetoun* (chicken with preserved lemon and olives, zesty in flavour and velvety in texture); *kefta bil matisha wa bayd* (meatballs in a rich tomato sauce with a hint of heat from spices and topped with a sizzling egg); and *lehem bil berquq wa luz*, (lamb with prunes and almonds served sliding off the bone into a saffron-onion sauce).

Before dinner, your host may appear with a pitcher and a deep tray. Hold out your hands, and your host will pour rosewater over them.

If you're in Morocco for a while, you may tire of the usual tajine options – until you come across one regional variation that makes all your sampling of chicken tajine with lemon and olives worthwhile. That's when you cross over from casual diner to true tajine connoisseur, and fully appreciate the passionate debates among Moroccans about such minutiae as the appropriate thickness of the lemon rind and brininess of the olives. Every region, city, restaurant and household has pronounced opinions you can actually taste in your tajine. No self-respecting Moroccan restaurant should ever serve you a tajine that's stringy, tasteless, watery or overcooked. Vegetarians can sometimes, but not always, request a vegetable tajine instead; ingredients are bought fresh daily in

small quantities, and the chef may not have factored vegetarians into the restaurant's purchases.

MECHOUI

The most powerful power lunch of all features *mechoui*, an entire lamb or calf that may be stuffed with couscous and some combination of almonds (or other nuts) and prunes (or other dried fruit). The whole beast is basted with butter, garlic, cumin and paprika, and slow-roasted until it's ready to melt into the fire or your mouth, whichever comes first. Sometimes *mechoui* is accompanied by kebabs or *kwa* (grilled liver kebabs with cumin, salt and paprika). Do not attempt to operate heavy machinery or begin a whirlwind museum tour post-*mechoui*; no amount of post-prandial mint tea will make such exertions feasible without a nap.

Vitamin-rich Moroccan argan oil is popular as a cosmetic, but also as a gourmet treat: the toasted-hazelnut flavour makes an intriguing dipping oil and exotic salad dressing.

DESSERT

At lunchtime, dessert is usually sweet mint tea served with almond cookies. You may not think you have room, but one bite of a dreamy *kaab al-ghazal* (crescent-shaped 'gazelle's horns' cookie stuffed with almond paste and laced with orange-flower water) will surely convince you otherwise. A light, refreshing option is the tart-sweet *orange a canelle* (orange slices with cinnamon and orange-flower water),

SNACKTIME (5-ISH)

Missed the *mechoui* at lunch? Follow your nose and growling stomach to a street vendor for these treats:

- roasted corn fresh off the brazier
- dry-roasted chickpeas with salt and cumin
- sweet or salty roasted almonds
- roasted sunflower seeds and pumpkin seeds
- hard-boiled eggs with fresh cumin
- sandwiches of brochettes or *merguez* with cumin, salt and *harissa*
- escargot (snails) in hot, savoury broth, ladled into a tin bowl or cup.

Even top chefs consult Paula Wolfert's *Couscous and Other Good Food from Morocco,* which includes 20 tantalising recipes for the titular dish and won the 2008 James Beard Cookbook Hall of Fame Award.

Other popular late-afternoon treats are coffee or mint tea at a café, ice cream at a *glacier* (ice-cream parlour), or Moroccan and French sweets from your local patisserie.

A LATE L'ASHA (DINNER)

Dinner in Morocco doesn't usually start until around 9pm, after work and possibly a sunset stroll. Most Moroccans eat dinner at home, but you may notice young professionals, students and bachelors making a beeline for the local *snak* or pizzeria. In the winter, you'll see vendors crack open steaming vats of *harira* (a hearty soup with a base of tomatoes, onions, saffron and cilantro and often lentils, chickpeas, and/or lamb). Dinner at

WHERE IN THE WORLD?

Can't quite place that taste? Here's where some of the distinctive flavours of modern Moroccan cuisine originate:

Essaouira Portuguese and Jewish origins.
Fez Andalucía (Spain) and Persia.
Marrakesh Senegal, France, Berber North Africa and Italy.
Tetouan Andalucía and Turkey.

home is probably *harira* and lunch leftovers, with the notable exception of Ramadan and other celebrations.

Do the Diffa

With enough hard currency and room in your stomach, you might prefer Moroccan restaurant dining to *snak* fare for dinner. Most upscale Moroccan restaurants cater to tourists, serving an elaborate *prix fixe* Moroccan *diffa* (feast) in a palatial setting. This is not a dine-and-dash meal, but an evening's entertainment that often includes belly dancing, live music and wine or beer. It's a novel experience worth trying at least once.

Fair warning about palace restaurants: your meal may come with a side order of kitsch. Many palace restaurants appear to have been decorated by a genie, complete with brass lamps, mirrors, tent fabric and cushions as far as the eye can see. Often it's the ambience you're paying for rather than the food, which can vary from exquisitely prepared regional specialties to mass-produced glop. Here's a rule of thumb: if the place is so cavernous that your voice echoes and there's a stage set up for a laser show, don't expect personalised service or authentic Moroccan fare.

Bloggers Samira and Sabah dish foodie secrets in English and French at http://moroccankitchen.blogspot.com, including recipes from their hometown of Fez.

Whether you're in for a *diffa* at a Moroccan home (lucky you) or a restaurant, your lavish dinner will include some combination of the following:

Mezze Up to five different small salads (though the most extravagant palace restaurants in Marrakesh and Fez boast seven to nine).

Briouat or brik Buttery cigar-shaped or triangular pastry stuffed with herbs and goat's cheese, savoury meats, or egg, then fried or baked.

Bastilla The justly famed savoury-sweet pie made of *warqa* (sheets of pastry even thinner than filo), painstakingly layered with pigeon or chicken cooked with caramelised onions, lemon, eggs and toasted sugared almonds, then dusted with cinnamon and sugar.

Couscous Made according to local custom (see p84); couscous variations may be made of barley, wheat or corn.

Tajine Often your choice of one of a couple of varieties.

Mechoui And/or some regional speciality (see p80).

Dessert This may be *orange a canelle*, a dessert *bastilla* (with fresh cream and toasted nuts), *briouat bil luz* (*briouat* filled with almond paste), *sfaa* (sweet cinnamon couscous with dried fruit and nuts, served with cream) or *kaab al-ghazal*.

EATING DURING RAMADAN

During Ramadan, most Moroccans observe the fast during the day, eating only before sunup and after sundown. Dinner is eaten later than usual – around 11pm – and many wake up early for a filling breakfast before dawn. Another popular strategy is to stay up most of the night, sleep as late as possible, and stretch the afternoon nap into early evening. Adapt to the local schedule, and you may thoroughly enjoy the leisurely pace, late-night festivities and manic feasts of Ramadan.

Although you will not be expected to observe the fast, eating in public view is generally frowned upon. Hence many restaurants are closed during the day and around *Iftour*, the evening meal when the fast is broken. But with a little planning, there are plenty of workarounds: load up on snacks in the market to eat indoors, make arrangements for breakfast or lunch in the privacy of your guest house, and ask locals about a good place to enjoy *Iftour*.

Lftour comes with all the traditional Ramadan fixings: *harira*, dates, milk, *shebbakia* (a sweet, coiled pastry that's guaranteed to shift your glucose levels into high gear), and *harsha* (buttery bread made of semolina and fried for maximum density). You may find that *harira* is offered free; even Moroccan McDonald's offers it as part of their special Ramadan Happy Meal.

CARE FOR SOMETHING STRONGER?

Yes, you can drink alcohol in Morocco without offending local sensibilities, as long as you're out of sight of a mosque and inside a restaurant, club, hotel, guest house or private home. One note of caution: quality assurance is tricky in a Muslim country where mixologists, micro-brewers, and licensed sommeliers are in understandably short supply, and your server may not be able to make any personal recommendations from the wine menu. Don't hesitate to send back a drink if something about it seems off; your server will likely take your word for it. Your best bets:

- **Casa** is a fine local pilsner beer, and **Flag** is a faintly herbal second-best.
- Admirable Moroccan white wines include crisp **Coquillages** and citrusy **Sémillant Blanc**.
- Reliable reds include the mellow **President Cabernet**, spicier **Medallion Cabernet** and zesty **Siroua S Syrah**.
- **Mojitos, caipirinhas**, and **negronis** are three imported cocktails that become local night-club favourites when made with (respectively) Moroccan mint, local kaffir lime, and orange juice/orange-blossom water. These Moroccan twists can make even low-end alcohol seem top-shelf...at least until tomorrow morning.

DRINK UP

To wash your *diffa* down and stay hydrated, you'll need a good amount of liquid. Serving alcohol within many Moroccan medinas or within view of a mosque may be frowned upon, and liquor licences can cost an astronomical Dh20,000 – but many Moroccan guest houses and restaurants get around these hurdles by offering booze in a low voice, and serving it out of sight indoors or on a terrace. So if you're in the mood for a beer and don't find it on the menu, you might want to ask the waiter in a low voice, speakeasy-style.

Moroccan tap water is often potable, though not always – so stick with treated water or local mineral water. Best bets are Sidi Ali and sparkling Oulmes; others have a chalky aftertaste.

Day and night, don't forget to drink plenty of bottled water. Vying to quench your thirst are orange-juice vendors loudly singing their own praises, and water vendors in fringed tajine-shaped hats clanging brass bowls together. If you want to take up these appealing offers, ask the vendors to pour right into your water bottle or a disposable cup – the glass cups and brass bowls are often reused, and seldom thoroughly washed.

When you're offered Moroccan mint tea, don't expect to bolt it and be on your way. Mint tea is the hallmark of Moroccan hospitality, and a sit-down affair that takes around half an hour. If you have the honour of pouring the tea, pour the first cup back in the teapot to help cool it and dissolve the sugar. Then starting from your right, pour each cup of tea from as high above the glass as you can without splashing. Your hosts will be most impressed.

Moroccan mint tea may be ubiquitous, but you can find a mean cup of coffee in Morocco too. Most of it is French-pressed, and delivers a caffeine wallop to propel you through the souqs and into the stratosphere.

Foodies who equate Middle Eastern food with Lebanese cuisine stand corrected by Claudia Roden's *Arabesque: A Taste of Morocco, Turkey and Lebanon*, which showcases Moroccan cuisine and won the 2007 James Beard Award (the culinary Oscar).

MOROCCO TO GO

Want to fix Moroccan feasts at home? Consider a cooking course (the best ones are in Marrakesh; see p307 for details) and give your home kitchen a Moroccan makeover with these kitchen supplies:

Harira pot A deep ceramic pot with a lid to keep soup hot.
Mortar and pestle Used to crush herbs, garlic and spices.
Tajine slaoui The earthenware cooking tajine in basic terracotta (fancy painted ones are for presentation only).
Tbiqa A basket with a pointed lid for storing bread and pastries.

EAT YOUR WORDS

Begin your taste adventure by picking up some Moroccan food lingo – for a pronunciation guide, see the Language chapter (p504).

Useful Phrases

Table for..., please.	*tabla dyal... 'afak*
Can I pay by credit card?	*wash nkder nkhelles bel kaart kredee?*
Can I see a menu please?	*nazar na'raf lmaakla lli 'andkum?*
I'm a vegetarian.	*makanakoolsh llehem*
What do you recommend?	*shnoo tansaani nakul?*
I'll try what she/ he is having.	*gha nzharrab shnoo kaatakul hiyya/ huwwa*
Without..., please.	*bla..., 'afak*
I'd like something to drink.	*bgheet shi haazha nashrubha*
I didn't order this.	*tlabtsh had shshi*
Please bring me...	*llaa ykhalleek zheeb li...*
some water	*shwiyya dyaal lmaa*
some salt	*shwiyya dyaal lmelha*
some pepper	*shwiyya dyaal lebzaar*
some bread	*shwiyya dyaal lkhoobz*
a napkin	*mandeel*
a beer	*birra*
a glass/bottle of red/ white/rose wine	*kaas/qar'a dyal hmar/ byad/roozi shshrab*
This is...	*Had shshi...*
brilliant!	*Ideed bezzef!*
burnt	*mahruqa*
cold	*barda*
undercooked	*ma taybash mazyan*
Cheers! (To your health!)	*Bsaha!*
The bill, please.	*Lahsaab, 'afak.*
Thank you.	*Shukran.*

Food glossary

MEAT

baqree	beef
farooj/dujaj	chicken
lehem	meat
kebda	liver
kelawwi	kidneys
lehem ghenmee	lamb
lehem jemil	camel

SEAFOOD

hut	fish
laangos	lobster
lamoori	cod
merla	whiting
qaimroon	shrimp
serdeen	sardines
shton	anchovies

sol	sole
ton	tuna

VEGETABLES & PULSES

'aads	lentils
batatas	potatoes
besla	onion
fasooliya	white beans
fegg'a	mushroom
khess	lettuce
khiyaar	cucumber
lbdanzhaal	aubergine
loobeeya	green beans
mataisha tamatim	tomato
qooq	artichoke
tooma	garlic
khoodar	vegetables
zeetoun	olives
zelbana bisila	peas

FRUIT

'eineb	grapes
banan/moz	banana
dellah	watermelon
fakiya	fruit
kermoos	figs
limoon	orange
meshmash	apricot
reman	pomegranate
teffah	apple
tmer	dates

OTHER FOODS

bayd	eggs
shorba	soup
filfil/lebzaar	pepper
fromaj/jiben	cheese
khoobz	bread
melha	salt
ships	chips
sukur	sugar
zabadee/laban/danoon	yoghurt
zebda	butter
zit	oil

Environment

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

More than the fully industrialised West, Morocco is a country where land and people live in close interdependence, and environmental challenges are part of everyday life rather than topics of discussion for pundits and campaigning groups. While urban drift presents its own developmental problems, around a quarter of the country's revenue still come from agriculture. Trade agreements with Europe have seen Morocco charging forward as a food exporter to a global market, but the country remains highly prone to other globalised environmental problems.

The World Bank's website (http://web.worldbank.org/morocco) reports in detail on the problems Morocco faces with water use and management.

North Africa has been slowly drying out for centuries. In the south, many rivers have been dry for over a decade and the subsequent burning of date palms and almond groves is nearly irreparable, while global warming has stolen valuable snowfall from mountain regions whose rivers depend upon the melt. Overgrazing is picking the land clean, thereby accumulating the pressures heaped upon the land by global environmental change. Desertification is the result, rendering crops defenceless against whipping sandstorms or torrential flooding. As the Sahara eats away at ever-growing tracts of southern Morocco, oases are left without natural defences and are in danger of drowning beneath the desert. In the end, the ravaged villages confront a crisis in their food and water supplies: poor health and sanitation fester, land becomes unsuitable for farming, and pristine environments are lost forever. The situation is better in the greener plain of the north – a breadbasket since Roman times – but even here the land is becoming pressured for more and more intensive farming.

The North African Environment at Risk, by Will D Swearingen and Abdellatif Bencherifa (eds) can be hard to find but it's worth hunting down as it deals comprehensively with the regional causes of environmental degradation.

Forests are constantly under threat with around 25,000 hectares of forest lost each year. The Atlantic pistachio and wild olive have already perished. The Moroccan pine, thuja and Atlas cedar are seriously at risk. Argan, red juniper, holm oak, canary oak and tauzin oak are very degraded. Damming for irrigation frequently diverts water from these environments, or strips downstream water of valuable silts needed to sustain coastal wetlands.

Although conservation practices are slowly improving, attempts to protect these ecosystems haven't always been a great success. In response to loss of ground cover from overgrazing, the Moroccan forestry department initially reacted by employing methods intended for temperate forest climates, with disastrous results: in the Forest of Mamora near Rabat, broom was thinned from under the cork oaks, leading to serious soil erosion – the trees later died from dehydration. Plantation programs are under way, some with international backing. Every year, two million fruit trees are distributed as the south fights to restore its palm groves. The Plan National de Replanter promised to meet the demand for timber by the year 2000, but has been criticised for planting rapidly growing trees – often foreign varieties, such as the increasingly ubiquitous eucalyptus – without considering suitability.

Want some suggestions on leaving light footprints during your trip? See 'Creative Conservation', p52.

Pollution is another problem that threatens to choke Morocco's environment. Industrial waste is routinely released into the sea, soil and waterways, thereby contaminating water supplies used for drinking and irrigation. Morocco's cities alone produce an annual harvest of 2.4 million tonnes of solid waste, while the draining of coastal wetlands – which provide important habitats for endangered species – continues apace to address the rising demand and falling supply of water for irrigation.

Those water supplies are also being drunk by thirsty tourism developments – either along the coast in places like Agadir or Saïdia or booming Marrakesh and Fez, where hotel complexes with giant pools and golf courses thirstily suck up a finite resource.

The coastal environment is being increasingly challenged, particularly along the Mediterranean shore where in recent years Morocco has been pushing the development of concrete megatourism projects. In a bid to outdo Spain's 'Costa' coast, apartment blocks, 1000-bed hotels and golf courses are being thrown up. Places like Saïdia have seen delicate sand-dune ecosystems torn up and paved over, juniper forest uprooted and the internationally important Moulouya wetlands (home to around 200 bird species) threatened with drying out as a result of building works. According to the European Environment Agency, nearly one in seven of Morocco's beaches have completely disappeared in the last few years.

If you're going for a dip, be aware that the Atlantic rollers can hide some fearsome riptides, and once you're in the waters there's nothing between you and the Americas (or at best, the Canary Islands).

LANDSCAPES

For those whose mental picture of Morocco is formed of palm-fringed oases and plenty of sand, the geographical variety of the country comes as a surprise. The desert is there of course, but you might not expect the dramatic and often snowy crags of the High Atlas, the green rolling plains of the north, the cliffs of the Mediterranean or the wide sweep of the Atlantic coast – all part of North Africa's most varied topography.

And everywhere, there are people interacting with their environment, be they olive farmers in the north, or shepherds leading their flocks to mountain pastures. Over half of all Moroccans still live in rural areas, and the land can in no way be separated from the people who inhabit it.

Coast

When the Arabs first arrived in Morocco, they rode their horses into the Atlantic and dubbed the country *Al-Maghreb* (where the sun sets),

ENVIRONMENTALLY PISTE-OFF

The dire state of the Moroccan environment is something in which we are all implicated. An example of this is in the invasion of the desert by tourist 4WD vehicles in a process known as the 'Toyotarisation' of the Sahara. With their large wheels, 4WDs break up the surface of the desert, which is then scattered into the air by strong winds. By one estimate, the annual generation of dust has increased by 1000% in North Africa in the last 50 years. And in case you thought that your 4WD tracks across the sands would soon be erased by the winds, remember that tracks from WWII vehicles are still visible in the Libyan desert six decades after the cessation of hostilities. Airborne dust is a primary cause of drought far more than it is a consequence of it, as it shields the earth's surface from sunlight and hinders cloud formation.

The consequences of our impatience in the desert extend far beyond Morocco and its desert communities. The stirred-up sand threatens to envelop the world in dust, with serious consequences for human health, coral reefs and climate change. Plankton on the surface of the world's oceans is also being smothered by sand, with devastating implications for marine life. Dust storms are increasingly common in cities like Madrid and the dust-laden winds threaten to transform 90% of Spain's Mediterranean regions into deserts. Once these deserts gain a European foothold, the process of desertification will be extremely difficult and costly to reverse. Sand from the Sahara has even reached as far away as Greenland, settling on icebergs and causing them to melt faster.

Exploring the desert by camel is infinitely more friendly to the environment, quite apart from the fact that it forces you to slow down to a desert pace, free from the intrusions of the modern world. It's also the best way to ensure that you leave behind nothing but easily erasable footprints in the sand.

knowing that the sea marked the western-most limit of their conquests. The coast has defined swathes of Moroccan history, from the Barbary pirates to the Allied landings of WWII, and is currently a key motor for the tourist industry. During the French Protectorate the Atlantic coast was simply dubbed *Maroc utile* (useful Morocco), compared to the relative dryness of the interior. The coastal strip from Casablanca to Rabat was subject to the largest development and today still dominates the country politically, economically and industrially. By contrast, the craggy Mediterranean coast has remained relatively undeveloped until recently, due to its location on the other side of the politically marginalised Rif Mountains. In the past few years, huge government investment has improved access, revealing it as home to some of Morocco's least known, yet loveliest landscapes.

Sahara: An Immense Ocean of Sand, by Paolo Novaresio and Gianni Guadalupi, has stunning Saharan images and informative text that'll have you dreaming of the desert.

While Mediterranean Morocco is mainly a coastline of sheltered coves and plunging cliffs, the long Atlantic littoral is more varied. The north is punctuated by raw and rocky beaches around Assilah, and wetland habitats like the lagoon of Merdja Zerga National Park, famed for its flamingos and wildfowl. From here, things gets more built up, with a concrete strip spreading along the sea from the big cities. South of Casablanca are the ports of Safi and Essaouira, both important tourist towns as well as fishing ports, and then the commercialised boardwalks of Agadir. Further south, the beaches empty into great sandy expanses stretching through Western Sahara to Mauritania.

The Anti Atlas Mountains were part of a chain of mountains formed when Africa and America collided 300 million years ago. The western half of the chain can be found in the Appalachian Mountains in the USA.

Fishing and trade continue to play important roles in the coastal economy. Lixus was an important port for the Phoenicians and Romans, while the cold Atlantic currents are rich in fish. More recently, Morocco's Atlantic coast has become notorious for a darker trade – smuggling sub-Saharan African immigrants to the Canary Islands.

Coastal weather is mild, with a tendency in the north to become cool and wet. Average daily temperatures range from 12°C in winter to 25°C in summer, but the humidity is constant and makes drying laundry nearly impossible. The southern Atlantic and eastern Mediterranean coasts are noticeably more barren.

Mountains

The topographical map of Morocco shows a series of mountain ranges rippling south and growing in size from the Mediterranean – the Rif, the Middle Atlas and the High Atlas, with the subchain of the Anti Atlas eventually petering out towards the desert. The monumental force of plate tectonics brought them into being, the most awesome of events being the collision of Africa and Eurasia around 60 million years ago, which not only forced up the High Atlas, but also closed the Strait of Gibraltar and raised the Alps and Pyrenees. In human times, the mountains have provided shelter for the self-contained Berbers and others who would escape (or rebel against) the invaders of Morocco.

The Sahara Conservation Fund (www.saharaconservation.org), which is dedicated to preserving the wild creatures of the Sahara, is a useful place for learning more about desert wildlife

In the north, the low Rif Mountains form a green and fertile arc that protects the coast from the arid West African interior. The independent-minded Tamazight Berbers have historically held themselves apart from the Moroccan state, and although this has led to the region being ignored and underdeveloped by the government, it's a situation they've turned to their advantage, turning the rough terrain over to kif (marijuana) cultivation. Summers here are comfortably sunny but come October the temperature begins to fall as steeply as the land itself. When the merciless winter gives way around April and May, an intensive and humid rainy season begins.

The Middle Atlas is the Moroccan heartland, with a patchwork of farmland riven with quiet country roads. Running northeast to southwest from the Rif, the range soars to 3340m at its highest point. Agriculture drives the daily routine of the inhabitants of this interior territory, and the plains at the feet of the mountains have grown many of Morocco's major cities, from Volubilis to Fez. The peaks themselves remain mostly forested, ideal trekking country, and home to the Barbary ape, Morocco's only (nonhuman) primate.

The low hills east of Agadir rise to form the gloriously precipitous High Atlas which towers over the villages of Marrakesh and reach the dizzy heights of Jebel Toubkal, North Africa's highest summit (4167m). These High Atlas peaks, some sculpted red, others cloaked in moss and pine, nurture wheat, walnuts and almonds but do little to shield the blistering sun. The temperature is stifling in summer, easily exceeding 40°C. Where the High Atlas drops away to the southeast, deep and winding gorges give way to the Sahara.

Lastly, further south, the low and calloused Anti Atlas drops into the Sahara and protects the Souss Valley from the hot desert winds.

Look out for storks nesting on minarets in old medinas – the way they perch and then bend to sit on their nests is regarded as symbolic of the Muslim prayer, with storks seen as auspicious and pious birds as a result.

Desert

South of the Anti Atlas, the barren slopes, slashed with more gorges, trail off into the stony, almost trackless desert of the Western Sahara. This sparsely populated and unforgiving region is bounded to the east and south by Algeria and Mauritania.

Cresting the Middle Atlas in the Zagora region draws you down through the clustered palms of the chiselled Drâa Valley and into the desolate dunes known as Tinfou and Erg Chigaga. Southeast in Er-Rachidia province are the saffron dunes of Merzouga, entry point to the great sand seas of the Sahara. This region is rich in kasbahs, remnants of the days of the trans-Saharan trade routes that made cities like Marrakesh so rich. Today, dates from the many palm groves provide the population's economic mainstay.

Even in winter the lowlands sizzle by day, with temperatures around 30°C, but the dry atmosphere lowers temperatures quickly in the evening and the nights can be frightfully cold, demanding layered clothing and good humour. The wild environment of the Moroccan deserts has also left its mark upon the people – the pace of life here is slower and the

COLD-BLOODED CAPITALISM

Sadly, the easiest way to encounter Morocco's wildlife, particularly its reptiles, is in the anything-but-natural surrounds of a souq. Snake charmers, stalls selling various reptiles (or parts of reptiles) for use in folk medicine, and tortoise shells turned into decorative fire bellows or banjolike musical instruments for souvenir-hungry tourists are common sights and, sadder still, common purchases made by tourists.

Take a close look at the snakes and you'll discover that their mouths are stitched closed, leaving tiny gaps for their tongues to flicker though. The snakes frequently develop fatal mouth infections and are unable to feed, requiring replacement by freshly caught specimens. As a result of the unceasing demand for tourist-charming snakes, numbers of Egyptian cobra have plummeted.

An estimated 10,000 tortoises are also killed annually for the tourist trade, which, when combined with large-scale habitat loss, helps explain why one of Morocco's tortoises *(Testudo graeca graeca)* is on the UN's Convention on the International Trade of Endangered Species list. Current legislation doesn't prohibit their sale (or the sale of their shells) within Morocco, but try to take an endangered tortoise out of the country and you'll be breaking the law.

conversations are less garrulous, with every aspect of life dictated by the daytime heat and by the need to draw near around the campfire at night.

For more information on birdwatching in Morocco, see p453.

WILDLIFE

An old overlanding hand once commented to us that Morocco was almost the perfect African country as it had mountains, deserts, historic cities and culture. Everything in fact, except wildlife. Well, Morocco teems with wildlife, although you'll generally need to get away from well-travelled routes to catch a glimpse of it. There are more than 40 different ecosystems that provide habitat for many endemic species. Unfortunately, the pressure upon these ecosystems from sprawling urban areas and the industrialisation upon Morocco's wilderness has ensured that much of the country's iconic plant and animal life is endangered.

Animals

COASTAL WILDLIFE

The camel – synonymous with Morocco's deserts – isn't a native species, but was introduced from Arabia around AD 600.

As cities like Casablanca and Tangier and Agadir-style resorts spread along the littoral, Morocco's marine life has come under increasing pressure. However, away from the urban sprawl, there are still long stretches of coastline free from an intensive human presence, with abundant bird populations and marine mammals such as dolphins and porpoises. Important bird species include white-eyed gulls, Moroccan cormorants and sandwich terns found along the beaches. On the Mediterranean coast, a remnant population of the Mediterranean monk seal, one of the world's most endangered mammals, is thought to still be clinging to existences.

Seabirds and freshwater birds are abundant in places like Souss-Massa National Park, with many species of duck and waders often migrating from Europe to spend winter in warmer Moroccan climes. This region also hosts a population of the endangered bald ibis.

DESERT

At first glance, the Sahara seems an impossible place to make a living, but its home to a surprising number of animal species. There are plenti-

LION KING

When the Romans took to feeding Christians to the lions, they looked to Morocco for their dinner companions. The Barbary lion, once found across the Atlas and Rif Mountains was a distinct subspecies, larger than savannah lions, with a thick black mane and a solitary habit adapted to its forested home. It preyed mainly on Barbary sheep, wild boar and deer. The last wild Barbary lion was shot in 1921.

Legend has it that the king of Morocco himself had been happily feeding wrongdoers to his personal collection of felines as late as 1914. The last dissident to meet this fate was apparently offered a short reprieve by the king, but instead retorted that, 'It's better to be eaten by lions than bitten by a dog', and was dispatched *tout de suite*.

The Parc Zoologique National in Rabat, along with European partner zoos has established a small captive-breeding program with the descendants of the king's man-eaters, now about 80% Barbary lion. Genetic markers are being used to determine the lions' pedigree, although claims by some zoos to have pure Barbary lions remain unverified.

This slow but genuine progress has some naturalists dreaming of a release program, although it's unlikely to find much favour with rural populations faced with such a feline neighbour.

BUSTARDS TAKE TO THE WING AGAIN

The spring of 2008 saw the culmination of a years-long project to increase the population of the endangered Houbara bustard, with the release of 5000 captive-bred birds into the eastern desert – believed to be the largest single reintroduction of any endangered species in the world.

The project is based at the Emirates Centre for Wildlife Propagation (ECWP) in Missour on the eastern edge of the Middle Atlas, and funded by the UAE, which has been leading the way in bustard captive-breeding since the early 1980s. Many feel this is especially appropriate as Houbara-bustard populations across the Middle East and North Africa have come under severe pressure, in large part due to their popularity as prey for falcon-hunting by wealthy Gulf Arabs. The ECWP is regarded as a model for captive-breeding of this flagship conservation species – bustards have been notoriously regarded as difficult to breed in captivity, due to their intricate mating behaviour and nervous disposition.

A third of the released birds were fitted with satellite transmitters to allow them to be monitored and studied within the total protected area of nearly 40,000 sq km.

ful rodents, including numerous varieties of gerbils and jerboas, and the desert hedgehog. Lizards such as skinks, spiny-tailed lizards, thrive, along with the horned viper. Higher up the food chain is the delightful fennec fox, an iconic desert species with fur-soled feet and huge batlike ears. It's nocturnal, but if you're staying overnight in the desert you might be lucky enough to catch a brief glimpse. Golden jackals are the most common large predator; in the remoter parts of the Western Sahara there are thought to still be some desert-adapted cheetahs, but their status is unknown. Dorcas and Cuvier's Gazelle are its main prey. The Addax, a larger antelope is almost certainly locally extinct, sadly following Morocco's oryx into the history book.

MOUNTAINS

The forested slopes of the mountains are Morocco's richest wildlife habitats. Their most famous denizen, in parts of the Middle Atlas and the Rif, is the sociable Barbary macaque (also known as the Barbary ape), most easily spotted around Azrou. Less easy to track are mountain gazelles, lynx and Barbary sheep. The last has benefited from governmental protection, good news for its top predator, the critically endangered Barbary leopard – the last population of leopards in North Africa.

Although outshone by the beautiful golden eagle, birds of this area include red crossbills, horned larks, acrobatic booted eagles, Egyptian vultures, and both black and red kites. Butterflies, too, are abundant, although you will probably only come across them in the spring. Species common to the area include the scarlet cardinal and bright-yellow Cleopatra.

Sahara: A Natural History, by Marq de Villiers and Sheila Hirtle, is a highly readable account of the Sahara's wildlife, its people and geographical history.

Plants

Morocco is particularly colourful in April and May when the country is briefly in bloom before the summer swelter. Highlights include irises, thyme, orchids, geraniums, cedar forests, oaks, thuja, pines, and, at higher altitudes, even juniper. The flower-studded pastures of the Rif Mountains are a particular delight. But the more appetising of Morocco's plant life are its fruits and legumes, particularly abundant in the south due to the semitropical climate. While pomegranate and fig trees are found throughout the country, you'll find orange groves in Agadir, walnut trees in Marrakesh, almond trees in Ouarzazate and date palms in Zagora.

NATIONAL PARKS

Morocco's record on environmental protection may be far from perfect, but the government has begun to set aside protected areas to arrest the alarming loss of habitat and the resulting disappearance of plant and animal species. Toubkal National Park in the Atlas Mountains was the first national park to be created in 1942, while Morocco's most impressive park, Souss-Massa National Park, was carved out in 1991 outside Agadir.

Evidence that Morocco is taking its environmental responsibilities seriously came in 2004 with the creation of four new national parks: Talassemtane (58,950 hectares) in the Rif; Al-Hoceima (48,460 hectares) in the Mediterranean, which protects outstanding coastal and marine habitats along the Mediterranean and one of the last outposts of osprey; Ifrane National Park (51,800 hectares) in the Middle Atlas, with cedar forests and Barbary macaques; and the Eastern High Atlas National Park (55,252 hectares). During this flurry of national-park creation, the Tazekka National Park was also enlarged.

In all, Morocco has 12 fully fledged national parks, as well as 35 nature reserves, forest sanctuaries and other protected areas which are overseen by Morocco's Direction des Eaux et Forêts. The parks have also provided a sphere for research into the region's biodiversity (including botanical inventories, bird censuses, primate studies and sediment analyses) and the causes of habitat loss that could have implications for unprotected areas beyond the parks' boundaries. Lately, the international community has also shown interest; the Spanish and American Park Services have used Morocco's protected areas as a base for their own research into broader biodiversity issues.

NOTABLE NATIONAL PARKS

National park	Location	Features	Activities	Best time to visit
Toubkal National Park (p425)	near Marrakesh	highest peak in North Africa	hiking, climbing	May-Jun
Souss-Massa National Park (p384)	south of Agadir	coastal estuaries and forests; 275 species of birds, including endangered bald ibis, mammals & enclosed endangered species	hiking, wildlife-watching birdwatching,	Mar-Oct
Lac de Sidi Bourhaba (p133)	Mehdiya	lake & wetlands; 200 migratory bird species, including marbled duck, African marsh owl & flamingo	swimming, birdwatching, hiking	Oct-Mar
Merdja Zerga National Park (p133)	Moulay Bousselham	lagoon habitats; 190 species of waterfowl, including African marsh owl, Andouin's gull, flamingo & crested coot	wildlife-watching	Dec-Jan
Talassemtane National Park (p444)	Chefchaouen	cedar & fir forests; Barbary macaque, fox, jackal & bats in the cedar forest	wildlife-watching, hiking	May-Sep
Bouarfa Wildlife Sanctuary (p288)	Bouarfa	red rock steppe	hiking, climbing	Apr-Oct
Tazzeka National Park (p282)	near Taza	oak forests & waterfalls	hiking	Jun-Sep
National Park of Al-Hoceima (p214)	Al-Hoceima	thuya forest, limestone escarpments, fish eagles	hiking, birdwatching	May-Oct

Of the parks that do exist, the age-old tension between increasing tourist revenues from national parks, and frustration over the parcelling of land and inattention to concerns like water shortages and health care, means that support among local communities for the new protected areas is patchy at best. Though the parks' missions are perceived as valuable, local communities have often not benefited quickly and directly enough from initiatives. The Ministries of Tourism and Agriculture temper this sentiment by reasoning that tourist activity means profits to fund future environmental programs – the very initiatives that will return plant and animal life to their original, more productive state, restore arable land and ultimately benefit the surrounding communities.

For all their problems, Morocco's national parks are becoming a major tourist drawcard, particularly for the opportunities they present for recreational activities in pristine wilderness areas. Toubkal National Park, for example, encompasses North Africa's highest mountain range and has rich camping, hiking and rock-climbing possibilities. As the parks' popularity grows, and with it Morocco's reputation as a venue for environmental tourism, the government has plans to make the parks self-supporting, mostly by charging admission.

The Al-Hoceima and Talassemtane parks in particular are examples of how far Moroccan nature conservation has come, integrating plans for promoting rural tourism and developing hiking routes. At the same time, the parks' authorities are working with local communities to allay their concerns and enable them to view the parks as a profitable alternative to kif cultivation.

Africa & the Middle East: A Continental Overview of Environmental Issues, by Kevin Hillstrom, contains an excellent exploration of North Africa's environmental past and future, focusing on how human populations impact upon the environment.